Primordial Images of Greek Religion

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I. THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN STUDIES ON ASCLEPIUS AND HIS PLACES OF WORSHIP

FOREWORD

This book invites you to take a stroll through the mythological sites of worship dedicated to the healing god, the god of Greek physicians, Asclepius. It is a way of promoting discussion on a particular approach to mythological research and applying it to studies on Asclepius, without seeking to impose it as the only possible one, but rather as one that may be of interest today to doctors interested in psychology, as well as to scholars of antiquity. Other works, conceived at the same time and within the same field of study as those presented here, do not support this approach. Nevertheless, to prevent the reader from feeling somewhat bewildered when confronted with contradictory findings on some essential point, we shall also address them.

The works I am referring to are compilations on the subject that are well worth considering: one deals with literary sources and inscriptions, and the other with a collection of important religious monuments. These are the two-volume work by Emma I. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of Testimonies*, Baltimore, 1945, and the book by Ulrich Hausmann, *Kunst und Heiligtum*, Potsdam, 1948. Both are based on a widely held conviction in this field of study, which rests on the assumption that the legend and historical tradition of the cult of Asclepius had already been explained, in essence and in a more or less definitive manner, by the end of the 19th century. This also clarifies his origins, for the figure who would later be known as the god of physicians is mentioned in the Iliad – like so many others – merely as a warrior-king, father of two heroes of the healing arts, Machaon and Podalirius, and is referred to only as ‘an excellent physician’. From the silence of the Homeric epic regarding the divine elevation of Asclepius and his myth, the conclusion was drawn that he had already been mentioned in his homeland as a ‘healing hero’, in the Thessalian city of Tricca, also mentioned in the Iliad. It was only later that he was elevated once more to the status of a deity – assuming he had already been a god in some immemorial time before. In any case, for centuries he was venerated only as a hero, a mortal hero. This veneration, precisely, the worship at the hero’s tomb, a place in

The place where people may already have dreamt of miraculous cures—and where some had indeed taken place—was the starting point: a purely hypothetical premise from which this line of research on Asclepius begins.

It is worth noting that there are works, such as the two mentioned, which could also stand on their own without the hypothesis of the beginning and the origin. The weakness of the hypothesis, which had been a dogma at the outset, can easily be demonstrated. From the Iliad, one cannot even deduce – viewed with rigour – that Asclepius was a healing hero in Tricca. The Homeric epode makes no mention of any cult dedicated to the figure it refers to merely as a valiant physician, and it is for this reason that one cannot in any case speak of the nature of the cult it omits: was it merely a hero cult, or perhaps the cult of a deity? The hero cult intensifies with his death, but the cult of a god termed ‘chthonic’ can also be understood as an intensification of the hero cult.
Who would now dare, quietly, to draw a clear line of demarcation with the intention of asserting that the fact that Homer makes no mention of a cult dedicated to the hero—if the *Iliad* makes no mention of it—means that the cult of the
‘chthonic’ divinity of Asclepius had not yet existed at that time?

Homer’s silence can only be understood when one recognises in it the meaning consciously sought by the Homeric conception of Greek religion. The works mentioned above do not do this, and must go to great lengths to explain the glory of Asclepius, which literature so much later proclaims as that of a great god. The theory that it was the priests at Epidaurus who invented this attribute has, of course, been abandoned, as Wilamowitz still maintained (and against which Hausmann objects, p. 18). Nor, however, is it a better solution to attempt to resolve the problem by invoking the cult of the physicians to Asclepius, thereby, in a sense, placing them in the priests’ stead as the inventors of their hero’s divine status (Edelstein, p. 93). The derivation of the cult of Asclepius – so rich in archaic elements – from a starting point as unclear as the cult of a ‘healing hero’ in Tricca is entirely imaginary, whereas the interpretation of post-Homeric sources and monuments, even if mistakes are made, is based on the specific transmission that pertains precisely to that part of the tradition considered appropriate, the one that corresponds to it above all as a historical right: the mythological transmission.

What a god represented for the Greeks is expressed in his myth; it is explored in their mythology through words and images. Anyone wishing to know who Asclepius was must visit his places of worship and, at the same time, delve into his mythology. The reason why these studies on Asclepius – whose hypotheses regarding his origins we have just discussed – did not take this approach is mainly due to two reasons. The first of these gives rise to chronological considerations which, upon brief reflection, immediately prove to be unfounded, even though they are based on what is not explicitly stated, in so-called historical-religious research which, even if treated as evidence, posits that what is not proven cannot exist; it can only be considered to exist after being mentioned, and is almost always the result of chance. One almost feels ashamed to have to debate this erroneous conclusion. It should therefore suffice to cite as a reference a master of the history of religion, Hermann Usener, who had already warned – in his essay 'Mythology' (Archiv für Religionswissenschaft 7, 1904, 42)— against the possibility of relying on the erroneous assumption that we possess more or less complete archives from all eras. He brands the hypothesis that whatever we do not know could never have existed as decidedly childish.

The story of Asclepius' birth – and the birth story is always the mythological motif that proclaims the essence of a god, in whose first manifestation it is most powerfully expressed – is, in fact, transmitted only in the post-Homeric era. But one might well ask whether it was Homer the poet who alluded to that miraculous event. Everything about him is non-Homeric, but that does not necessarily make him post-Homeric. The decipherment of Mycenaean script extends the duration of the history of pre-Homeric Greek religion by several centuries, a history marked by names and references; if we adhere to the dates we have up to those of the Homeric poems (9th–7th centuries BC), its past stretches back by more than half a millennium. It has now become genuinely possible – as was demonstrated in the first report – to speak of Greek myths, as was customary between the 15th and 13th centuries BC (Ventris and Chadwick: 'Evidence for Greek Dialect in the Mycenaean Archives', Journ. Hell. Stud. 73, 1953, 95). The apparent impossibility of doing so led to the formulation of more than one line of imaginary development, as in the case of Asclepius. However, the same also occurred with Paeon, who according to Homer was the physician of the gods,

who will be discussed in the penultimate chapter. With the following example, and before taking a look at the myth of Asclepius from a modern perspective, I would like to outline the current state of research.

In the case of Paean, and drawing on the imaginary lineage of the fame of ‘Paean’, an equally imaginary magical chant is derived (since no magical chant with this refrain has been handed down to us), all the way back to the Homeric god Paean: ‘Peán is not worshipped at all; he is merely the personification of the healing song embodied in the physician himself’ (as Nilsson explains, following others, Geschichte der Griechischen Religion I², 159). Paiavon currently appears among the earliest Greek names of deities that have been read in Mycenaean script: according to the rules of the Mycenaean dialect, this would correspond to Peán. It belongs to the myths of the 15th–13th
BC, and in Knossos, where he is mentioned in the 15th century BC, he was already the object of worship. A thousand years later – to use a round figure – the song is still sung which, after him, came to be known as a cult song and still bears his name in the refrain: ‘Pean must not forsake us, he must never forsake us!’. Here we must admire the unwavering devotion to an ancient god. The one to whom it was dedicated is so deeply woven into the song as rarely has a Greek god been. This, however, does not mean that he is the song or ever was. The god and the song are closely united in worship. It is, however, a characteristic of Homeric theology that it conceives of the god as floating far above the world of men who heal the gods of Olympus. My interpretation of it in the penultimate chapter (p. 107) is borne out by this new insight into the overall picture.

Homer even kept a certain distance from the paean—a song that was excessively fervent and too closely associated with the sun god, Apollo—although he too allowed the paean to resound in the *Iliad* as a song of thanksgiving and triumph. The Homeric Apollonian hymn singles out the Cretans (518) as excellent singers of the paean: they are said to have introduced this song as an accompaniment to Apollo at Delphi – an island where the name Paean is documented. Homer maintained an even greater distance from Dionysus and his cult. And not because he was a young god for Homer, having arrived in Greece relatively late! (This is, nowadays, another failed hypothesis). His name had already been confirmed in the

Mycenaean writing from the 13th century, in the southern Peloponnese, at Pylos, and his cult was certainly not limited, either in time or space, to the veneration shown and attested at the ‘palace of Nestor’. He too formed part of the myths of the 15th–13th centuries, although this particular myth was not one of those mentioned by Homer. The development of the myth – the mythological motif of the god’s birth and the story of Dionysus and Ariadne – is only found later, although allusions can be seen in the Homeric poems, at least in the story of Ariadne. In all these stories there are variations on the same theme. They are undoubtedly pre-Homeric at their core, and at the same time constitute the most immediate parallel with the story of the birth of Asclepius. Only the names sound different there: the same pre-Homeric, and surely pre-Greek, mythological motif is recounted.

The parallels between the story of Ariadne and the mythological motif of the birth of Asclepius were outlined to some extent by Walter F. Otto in his book *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (p. 55), with the aim of explaining the Homeric account of the death of the Cretan king’s daughter. The parallelism, when fully drawn out, establishes the exact contours of one of the most important mythological motifs in the history of Greek religion: the enactment of the myth, which was also performed in the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the Homeric poem, although the mythological motif was known to him, the performance was omitted. In the Odyssey it is said (11, 320) that Theseus could not have taken Ariadne too far away as a captive, since Artemis killed her on the island of Dia at the behest of Dionysus. Otto recognised in these events the analogy with the story of Coronis, mother of Asclepius. Murdered by Artemis, on Apollo’s orders, for having been unfaithful to him, the father of her child. These arguments also run parallel to this incredible event, which the mythological motif essentially recounts with absolute equivalence. Asclepius was born from Coronis’s funeral pyre: Apollo snatched the child from the arms of his dead mother. The mythological motif recounts the cult of Ariadne in Cyprus, who died there during childbirth. However, in one of the sacramental acts of this cult, a young man imitated the contractions of childbirth. In a sense, he snatched them from her, so as to be able to play the role of Zeus. For Zeus did something similar at the birth of Dionysus: after she went into premature labour with her

son Dionysus, not because of a bonfire, but in the blaze of the fire of the thunderbolts, he took charge of Semele's pregnancy and carried it to term.

Birth in death: this is what this mythological motif proclaims.
A myth certainly not of Homeric origin! Only the name of the god, whose birth is a similar birth, sounds different each time, and the impossible is integrated with coherence, in which it appears as possible, just as perhaps the cure of a deadly illness is very possible within the realm of Asclepius. In the cult of Ariadne in Cyprus, the birth of Dionysus was repeated, although the child is not named to us. Dionysus was not born only in death in his Theban birth story, but also in the later Orphic variant: as the son of Persephone. If this version were not based on an ancient tradition, then it would have to be the translation of Semele's name into Greek: in the Phrygian language it meant 'the Chthonic, she of the underworld', that is, Persephone.1 Linked to the fire that consumed Semele and Coronis at the pyre – from which Asclepius was born – it appears as another way of expressing the setting in which the miraculous birth takes place: the realm of the queen of the underworld, the kingdom of the dead. And this very event—the birth of a divine child in the realm of the dead, a son of the great goddess of the underworld, a birth amidst death—was announced by the hierophants in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

This statement can be found in the final chapter (p. 113). The studies presented here on Asclepius, though not intended as such, already converged towards this mythologem: the fulfilment of the myth of a miraculous birth from death, which in the myth of healing, in the myth of Asclepius, took a turn towards the Hellenic to become religio medici, the religion of the Greek physician. This free and fluid convergence corresponds to the non-dogmatic nature of these studies, and here we leave them as they stand; it suffices that they have been confirmed through the contours of the underlying mythological motif and that they can be demonstrated with precision. That the name of Ariadne appears linked to this mythological motif is a fact that also corresponds to a specific chronological significance. In this way, Coronis appears as a repetition, not only of Semele, but also of Ariadne, because both are known by the double name that expresses both their divine and mortal nature: Coronis was also called Egle, and Ariadne was also called Aridela. This

suited the goddesses, and possibly a specific goddess of whom, by way of approximation, we shall also speak in the various studies. But Ariadne received offerings of honey at Knossos, as labyrinthoio potnia, as ‘lady of the labyrinth’, and her cult, which was attested in the fifteenth century in Crete, probably became the cult of the Cretan goddess of the underworld.2 The story in which Coronis, upon her death, gave birth to a son of Apollo who was the likeness of his father, Asclepius, may be a later story than that of Ariadne, in which Dionysus made her a mother by causing her to give birth to a son in death: in any case, it is the same pre-Hellenic sacred story.

One explanation for why, in studies of Asclepius, preference is given to the invention of imaginary origins rather than consulting the mythological tradition, lies in chronological considerations, which are based on the chronology of our mythological sources and the history of mythological content, of the myths and their basic manifestations—the mythologems. Achieving a correct chronology, based on the logic of the content, is entirely possible.3 It is clear, as far as the content is concerned, that in the story of Asclepius’ birth a non-Homeric, and probably also pre-Homeric, mythologem is repeated. This would have been complicated in an era when the mythologem was doubly valid: for Eleusis, on the one hand, and for the religion of Dionysus, on the other, both as a distinct mythologem and, in part, as a basic mythologem, kept secret and, in a sense, confined to specific areas of the two cults (since the cult of Dionysus was itself a semi-secret cult). We shall be able to observe, step by step, the convergence between the two cults.

The other reason perhaps lay in a general fear. In a brief retrospective on the history of mythological research, Otto noted – in his book Theophany, devoted to the spirit of Homeric religion, but by no means to the phenomenon of ancient Greek religion as a whole – that genuine mythological research had received a fatal blow from the controversy sparked by Creuzer’s symbolism, which was not to be revived until the present day. With this observation, he pronounced, albeit in a simplified manner, on the state of affairs. Attributing myths to secret priestly teachings was a failed experiment on Creuzer’s part, and the refutation of his errors allowed only denials that led to no

fruitful beginning. Under the false name of ‘symbolic’ had emerged the old ‘allegorical’, a late successor to the Greek Sophists, who had begun the reduction of mythology to something else: to teachings concerning man and the world. The true symbolist, Goethe, around 1810, rejected both Creuzer and the anti-symbolist Voss. He was the only one at that time who reflected with sufficient rigour on symbols and attributed to them the meaning they truly held in the ancient religions.4 The Aegean scene in Faust II is an example of his mythology and also deserves consideration by scholars.5 Yet neither his style nor his occasional remarks on symbol and allegory (one is mentioned in note 51) had any effect on mythological research.

It is not only Creuzer’s methods that give cause for concern, but also those of his followers in their approach to mythological research, when the resolve or capacity for a new beginning eludes the decisive immediacy of the subject matter. At least Creuzer, even if his assessment amounts to nothing more than a misunderstanding, did not underestimate the religious significance of mythology. But it was he who initiated
‘the reduction to something else’ in recent times, and those who followed suit, in essence, did the same. This reduction continued to natural phenomena, to erratic reflections or particular ways of thinking and poetic inventions, to social norms and unconscious psychological processes – always focused on something different, in the search for something simple hidden behind the richness and versatility of mythology or behind nothingness. For there was also the aim of demonstrating that in mythology there was nothing, no meaning that invited reflection, or perhaps, at best, only a practical utility, an intention to classify, to catalogue, to explain. The allegorical and its counterparts, the anti-allegorical and the anti-symbolic in their positivist representation, were the ones who time and again recorded the subject based on a flawed chronological principle, and who classified it as an imaginary history of evolution and refused from the outset to speak of mythological tradition – an ancient tradition among others – using an appropriate interpretation. The positivist concept of myths focused more on negations and warnings regarding what should not be sought in mythology. These were conclusions false derived from flawed reductions, whose main error

was to present an isolated aspect of mythology as if it were the only true one.

All this also prompted a fresh start, due to literature's confrontation with mythology, with the misconceptions and the partially true assertions expressed therein, whilst also highlighting those truths already articulated by mythology itself, in order to move away from the reliance on tradition in favour of theory—which, admittedly, is also essential, but is not the concern of this book.6 Here I merely wish to recall that analogy – from the Introduction to the essence of mythology – on which I believed I could base a new beginning, without having to bear the burden caused by the distressing legacy of mythological research. It concerned the analogy between mythology and music. An analogy which, thanks to the observations set out by Otto in his book The Muses and the Divine Origin of Song and Speech (1954), can be explored in greater depth. I reproduce here his words on the music of the animal kingdom – 'original music', so to speak – to better illustrate the ideas on mythology defended in the following studies concerning Asclepius.

Wherever the simplest musical cadence appears, the living creature finds itself in a state entirely different from that experienced when hearing a mere sudden cry. And when we ask ourselves about the meaning of original musicality, it is this state that matters. It is also present in many cases in the songs of animals; it is self-sufficient, and serves no purpose nor expects any effect. These songs are known, and rightly so, as representations of themselves. They emerge to express their essence, as a primal need of the creature. But this representation of the self requires a present to which to address itself. This present is the natural environment. No creature exists on its own; all are in the world, and this means that each is in its own world. The singing creature thus represents itself in its world and for its world. As it represents itself, it perceives itself, and joyfully makes its call and welcomes it with jubilation. Thus the lark soars to dizzying heights through the pillar of air that is its world and, with no other purpose, sings the song of itself and its surroundings. The language of its own being is, at the same time, the language of the reality of the world. A living knowledge resounds in its songs. The

A man who makes music undoubtedly has a broader and richer natural environment. Even if, at heart, the phenomenon is identical. He too must express himself through sound, for no other purpose, and it matters not whether others hear him or not. However, the representation of oneself and the revelation of the world are here equally one and the same thing. Whilst representing oneself, reality encompasses one's entire being, and is expressed through one's sounds.

The relationship described between self-representation and the revelation of the world must be understood as a parable, and this relationship is the only one that can serve as a parable for us, but not the act of putting it into practice. The song of men and their world is the parable for 'primordial mythology'. Mythology is the representation of man – in Dionysian religion it is even known as the representation of the living being – and it is likewise the revelation of the world. Man's very existence, and the reality that embraces his entire being, are expressed in it at the same time, in the very form of being of mythology, which is not that of music or any other art, nor that of science, nor that of philosophy. Nothing human and nothing in the world around us is excluded from mythology, even if it is represented in another way, such as the object of astronomical observations or psychological research. But there is more. That we do not consider one-dimensional boundaries to be valid and that we prefer tradition to an unprovable hypothesis of origin are not merely theoretical assumptions in this book.

The text of the studies on Asclepius, as it emerged from the examination of the tradition between 1943 and 1947, is reproduced below. It was primarily a philological undertaking, an attempt at exegesis of the sources and monuments, in the sense of that task which I had identified – in my *Apollon* (3rd ed., Düsseldorf, 1953, p. 87)—as a task of the science of classical antiquity: leading to a return to the ancient lands, observed directly in the realities of antiquity's own mode of being. It is not an attempt to make use of the methods of Jungian psychology. C. A. Meier's book, *Antike Inkubation und moderne Psychoterapie* (C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich, 1949), shows us how a subject from the same field is treated in Jung's school. Although a solid philological foundation is an obvious requirement for the three forms

of studies on Asclepius – whether Edelstein and Hausmann's, C. A. Meier's, or my own – they remain three distinct paths, which one can only hope will converge.

In this foreword, however, I must once again address the text that formed the basis of my studies and was a genuine philological concern. This is the song of Isilo of Epidaurus, carved in stone and displayed in the sanctuary of Asclepius. The poet and donor would never have accepted, with a typographical error that distorted the meaning, the inscription by the sculptor to whom he had commissioned the work; and even less would he have displayed it. The text, as the basis of my interpretation, is quite reliable (p. 66). However, a spelling mistake would not have prevented the Greeks from reading it correctly, nor would even an imperfection in the stone have been a reason for its return. That being the case, I now believe that the two lines, in which Wilamowitz – with E. Kalinka in Diehl: Anthologia Lyrica II², 1942, 6, 116; and Hiller von Gärtringen, Athenische Mitteilungen 67, 1942, 230 ff.– had noted Isilo's 'stammering', should be read as follows:

ἐκ δὲ Φλεγύα γένετο, Αἴγλα δ' ὀνομάσθη.

That was her surname; otherwise she was known as Coronis.

And she was the daughter of Phlegias – and her name was Egle – this was her second name, but at that time she was generally called Coronis.7

In order to advance our knowledge, we must above all hope that the excavations of Professor J. Papadimitriu, which have already uncovered the temple of Apollo Maleatas on the sanctuary of Epidaurus, with its imposing foundations of Mycenaean remains, will continue within the Hieron itself. Only then will we have a truly justified understanding of the history of the cult of Asclepius at Epidaurus. The picture we have today remains highly uncertain. I shall discuss the small find, about which I provide full details on p. 75, at greater length in the supplement to my book *In the Labyrinth* (2nd ed., Zurich, 1950, p. 61). As for the object itself, I have been unable to locate it during my two recent visits to the Hieron. But it may still

appear. The definitive confirmation of Apollo's character—specifically, the idiosyncrasies of the sun god, which in no way preclude his other aspects—was provided by W. F. Otto in his essay 'Apollon', published in the journal *Neues Abendland* 4, 1944, p. 80. An extensive monograph on the small deity clad in a cucullus (pp. 44–57) is presented in W. Deonna: De Telesphore au 'moine bourru', Collection Latomus 21 (Berchem-Brussels, 1955). Archaeology will assist us on our journey into the past. We would do well to exercise restraint regarding any hypothesis – this is particularly true in the case of Grégoire, Goossens and Mathieu, in their book Asklepios, Apollon Smintheus et Rudra (Brussels, 1950) – before the spade enables us to explore the deeper strata.

I would like to thank Ciba Aktiengesellschaft, of Basel, for the book's reissue with its original illustrations, and also the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, of Darmstadt, for the reissue itself.

Ascona, Switzerland; Casa del Sol, 9 September 1956

The historical-religious observations, published here under the title The Divine Physician, are closely related to the history of medicine. The traditions concerning Asclepius – in which Greek physicians venerated their original father – and those concerning Apollo, his own father, Chiron, his teacher, and his son Machaon, everything we know of them, of their physician-god relatives and of the heroes of mythology, everything we know through the monuments of worship, belongs to a field that borders on mythological research, archaeology, the psychology of religion and the psychology of medicine, which, in a way, aids our attempt to delve into the 'prehistoric strata' of the medical profession.

This is why the author chose an approach that is both archaeological and psychological. As regards the setting and time period, he begins his exploration at the most accessible level, allowing readers to look around and familiarise themselves with the unfamiliar; and with each of the five observations, he peels back a layer, as it were, in order to reach a deeper one.

The framework for these ‘mythological walks’ – if I may call them that, paraphrasing the famous and much-loved model of ‘archaeological walks’ – was shaped by the aim of exploring Asclepius and his principal places of worship. Consequently, this work does not present the full body of archaeological and philological research, but rather a selection of how mythological research has been applied from a personal perspective. However, the author experienced something similar to what usually happens on guided archaeological walks: whilst trying to arouse interest in some of the objects he was showing, these proved more interesting to him than to his companions. In thinking of his readers—particularly doctors with an interest in psychology and lovers of antiquity—the author has always felt greatly inspired. He is aware that he is only at the beginning of a presentation that truly and comprehensively covers the circle of the gods—Apollo, Asclepius and Hygieia—and that can satisfy all demands.

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TIMELINE

From 1500 BC – Demonstrable existence of Greek mythology, to whose flourishing in Thessaly the centaur Chiron belongs, propagator of medicine and teacher of Asclepius. See ‘The Origins in Thessaly’, page 113.

Before 600 BC – The flourishing of Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, the oldest sources concerning the physician Asclepius and his family. See: ‘Heroic Physicians and the Physician of the Gods in Homer’, page 89.

600–400 BC – The flourishing of the Asclepiad medical family on Kos; approximately between 460 and 377 BC, the lifetime of Hippocrates, shortly after the founding of the sanctuary of Asclepius in the grove of Apollo Cyparissus. See: ‘The Sons of Asclepius in Kos’, page 77.

500–300 BC – First flourishing of the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus. In 420, foundation of the filial cult in Athens; around 300, inscriptions of the ‘Healings of Apollo and Asclepius’ and the paean of Isilus of Epidaurus. See: ‘The healings at Epidaurus’, page 41.

291 BC – Foundation of the filial cult on the Tiber Island in Rome, a decisive step towards the subsequent spread of the cult of Asclepius throughout the Roman Empire. See: ‘Asclepius in Rome’, page 29.

ASCLEPIUS IN ROME

Visitors to Rome often take a lovely stroll along the banks of the Tiber until they reach Ponte Garibaldi, and then, a few steps further on towards the Aventine Hill, they unexpectedly arrive at the sanctuary from which the healing power of the Greek god of medicine radiated throughout the Roman Empire. There, on the Lungo Tevere dei Cenci, one suddenly finds oneself facing the hospital island, the Isola Tiberina, where, alongside the hospitals, stands the church of San Bartolomeo [Fig. 1]. Church and hospital, side by side, represent the legacy of an ancient Asclepeion: the entire enclosure was a place of worship unique in its form.1 At the southern tip of the island, if one looks closely, one discovers the remains of the ancient travertine stone parapet [fig. 2]. This is what gave the island its ship-like appearance [fig. 3], in memory of the healing god's journey from his Greek homeland of Epidaurus to Rome. On the travertine wall, part of the relief of Asclepius – known as Aesculapius to the Romans – and a snake coiled around a staff are still visible. Inside the island church are columns from ancient temples. And one can still discover something else that does not quite fit with the home of a Christian god: the mouth of a spring amidst the steps leading to the presbytery. Its interior is adorned with 12th-century paintings, as the present-day church of San Bartolomeo was not built until around the year 1000. However, this particular arrangement coincides with a 'secret of the temple', of which the Greek traveller Pausanias had been told. In Epidaurus, when he asked why they did not bring water or oil to the temple for the care of the ivory fragments of the statue of Asclepius, the priests replied that the cult image rested upon the mouth of a spring.2 And although they did not find it again when excavating the sanctuary, it seems that springs of this kind were almost always a requirement for the temples of Asclepius.

From the church and hospitals on Tiber Island—in a sense, a unique, living monument to the cult of Asclepius—our journey must lead us to the god in whom the ancient physicians recognised the source and original image of their profession, their spiritual and

physical precursor. Before setting out on this path, however, let us consider what the ancient physicians' belief in their father Asclepius signifies, as well as their lineage, which is regarded with such seriousness. The representatives of classical Greek medicine, which flourished in the Hellenic East, particularly on the islands of Knidos and Kos, and among them Hippocrates – known as Hippocrates the Great to distinguish him from his grandsons and relatives of the same name – were members of a single family, a lineage of physicians. The Hippocratic Oath, which has been handed down to us through a collection of Hippocratic manuscripts, obliged anyone wishing to practise this profession to regard the professor of medicine as a father, and the professor's children as brothers, to whom, as if they were his own children, he was to impart his teachings free of charge.3 The art of healing was passed down through the family line, from father to son, and outside this line, paying students occupied only second place and had to take the same oath as the others, thus becoming, in a sense, adopted sons and members of the same great family. Asclepius was regarded as the father of the lineage of physicians. All Greek physicians, according to their own belief, were descended from him, and this is why they are also known as Asclepiads, 'sons of Asclepius'.

In this living tradition, put into practice by every doctor, attention must be paid to two related aspects: on the one hand, a god-doctor, Asclepius of dreams, visions, mythological imaginings and worship; and, on the other, a techne (τέχνη), a knowledge and power passed down as a family tradition and at the same time bequeathed by father to son as a gift. The preservation of a technique learnt through transmission and the firm and conscious upholding of the idea of descent, as a prerequisite for that τέχνη of 'art', go hand in hand. The ancient form of expression for this behaviour was that of a mythical genealogy and the corresponding family cult. Thus, the creator god, the father of the lineage, rather than the source of transmitted knowledge, is the individual basis for an inherited gift, regarded as a divine figure. The figure of the god-healer Asclepius, in this case, should reflect something of the deepest origins of Greek medicine. Even if this is merely the development of a generalised allusion, it should nonetheless be capable of lending a special meaning to the historical role of an ancient deity.

The arrival of Asclepius in Rome was a historic event, instructive in every detail and above all in its legendary embellishments. It is a depiction of the god in his own milieu, the elements of which can be traced back to Greece to their earliest origins. The sources recount the unfolding of the event—the transfer of a sacred serpent from Epidaurus to Rome—and are essentially consistent.4 In the years 295–293 BC, Rome was afflicted by the plague. The ancient way of conceiving it, as well as the manner of expressing it, equated this disease with the effects of a fire: the plague 'consumed', says Livy, referring to its devastation.5 And the Greek senses in the background the bodies charred by the inner fire, and also the enraged Apollo in the background of the pyres on which the corpses are burned. The following lines6 are written at the beginning of the Iliad:

… the silver bow let out its terrible snap.

At first he shot only at the mules and the swift dogs;

but soon their deadly arrows struck the men, and everywhere

pyres laden with corpses began to blaze…

In such cases, people turned to Apollo, in accordance with the ancient principle of homeopathy, which in antiquity was known as a famous saying from an oracle of Apollo himself: 'He who wounds also heals'.7 In the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros there are inscriptions recording the god's responses when people implored his help against a plague.8 The oracle, first and foremost, demanded the erection of a statue of Apollo; that is to say, it demanded the presence of the god in the form in which the aforementioned verses of the Iliad describe him. A fourth-century Greek statue, a copy of which is known as the Belvedere Apollo,9 shows us the god who kills, purifies and heals [fig. 4].

When the Romans, in the year 293, consulted their own Apollonian oracle, the Sibylline Books told them that they should invite Asclepius of Epidaurus to Rome. Such advice would have been unthinkable if Asclepius

had not already been known, even at that time, in Italy, and even in Rome itself, as a healing god who, in this capacity, represented Apollo. The transfer of a new and powerful deity from abroad to Rome required a complex ceremony – that is, religio –10 which had to be carried out with care and attention. For the time being, only a single day of prayer was dedicated to Asclepius, as the city was still at war. It was not until the year 291 that, finally, under the command of Q. Ogulnius, ten men were sent to Epidaurus to bring the god to Rome. The essential features of this ceremonial process are highlighted in a significant way in Ovid's poetic account, in Book XV of the Metamorphoses. Firstly, the idea that healing, though not immediately, originates from Apollo. Ovid emphasises this thought by substituting the Sibylline Books with the greater Apollonian authority, through Delphi itself:11

When, weary of funerals, they realise

that human resources are powerless, that the arts of

physicians are of no avail, they seek the aid of heaven

and turn

to Delphi, the navel of the world and oracle of Phoebus, and

implore the god that, with a salutary oracle, he may deign to

come to their aid

in their misfortune, and put an end to the evils of such a great

city. Both the place and the laurel and the quiver borne by the

god trembled at once, and from the depths of the sanctuary the

tripod uttered these words that struck fear into their terrified

hearts: 'What you seek here, Roman, you should have sought

in a nearer place; seek it now in a nearer place. It is not Apollo

whom you need to ease your sorrows,

but the son of Apollo."

The Roman Senate is then informed of the location of the seat of Apollo's son, as he is presented as a young and as yet unknown god who has now taken up his father's legacy. The healing god is no longer Apollo himself, who is also known by the epithets 'Healer' and 'Physician' – for the Romans: Apollo Medicus –12 but Asclepius, who is highly venerated in Epidaurus. The delegation was sent there on the Romans' behalf with the task of bringing this very god to Rome. But the Epidaurians clearly had a different view. For them, Asclepius always remained in Epidaurus, though he continued to heal in all those places where a subsidiary cult of the god was established, places to which a sacred serpent was sent to perform this task. Ovid describes this based on the Roman conception of the process. The Epidaurians, according to him, were divided in their views: whilst some did not wish to deny aid to the Romans, others wished to keep the god for themselves alone. Ultimately, it is Asclepius himself who makes the decision, in his own manner—which is specific to Epidaurus—and, just as he does with the sick man sleeping in his temple, he appears in a dream to Q. Ogulnius. The god appears before the Roman camp:

With the appearance he usually has in his temple,

and in his left hand he held a rustic staff

and with his right hand he stroked the hair of his long

beard, and with a calm heart he spoke these words:

'Fear not! I shall go and leave my images behind. You, just look

closely at this serpent which coils around my staff with its rings,

and do not lose sight of it until you are able to recognise it.

I shall transform into it, but I shall be greater and appear as large

as the celestial beings must appear when they transform."

Asclepius appears to Ogulnius in a dream, just as he is depicted in his temple: the form of appearance captured by the ancient sculptors. Thrasymedes had sculpted him for the Epidaurians as an enthroned figure in gold and ivory, and this is also how he is shown on the coins of Epidaurus, this cult image with the serpent before him [fig. 5]. We are also aware of another connection between the enthroned god and the serpent [fig. 6]. Whilst during the heyday of his cult, attested by the long list of healings at Epidaurus,13 and already mentioned by Aristophanes in Athens,14 Asclepius was most often seen in the dreams of the sick who slept in the temple, just as Ovid describes him. This is how the most notable statues depict him [fig. 7]: the serpent coiled around the staff, and the god leaning upon it. Ovid remains faithful to this human image of the deity, though at the same time he describes his animal form.

That very morning, the Epidaurians themselves asked Asclepius for a sign:

… No sooner had they finished speaking than the god,

in the form of a golden serpent with a high crest, made his

presence known with a hissing sound, and upon his arrival

caused the statue, the altar, the doors, the marble floor and the

golden ceiling to tremble,

and came to a halt in the middle of the temple, standing

upright to the chest, and cast his fiery, sparkling gaze

around.

The crowd was seized by panic; the priest, with his chaste hair bound

with white ribbons, recognised the deity and said:

‘There you have the god; it is the god! Let all present

from evil words and thoughts. May your epiphany, beautiful god, be

a blessing, and protect the peoples who worship you."

A rather un-Greek epiphany for a god who is, in every other respect, a beautiful Greek god. But precisely for that reason, it is at the same time a unique opportunity to observe the defining feature of the Asclepiean religion, which sets it apart from the Olympian world of the Homeric gods. 'Chthonic' would be the ancient term, and, from another perspective, 'numinous' would be the modern designation. Terms that would encompass different aspects of the same phenomenon, though always with a single perception, whereas here several might coincide at the same time. An English writer, D. H. Lawrence, captures the essence of this when, referring to the symbol of the serpent, he says[15] that it reaches such depths "that a slight brush against the grass can even lead the most rigid and modern man to the deepest strata, those furthest removed from his domain". In the cult of Asclepius, the deepest and most hidden parts of man rise towards the golden, ivory and marble surfaces of the Greek temples. And it is precisely this cult, which reaches such depths, that now arrives in Rome. The serpent god chooses the route via the port of Epidaurus and boards the Roman ship himself – so it is explained to us.

The voyage proceeded with a fair wind until they reached Antium. It is not only Ovid who recounts how the snake left the ship there to rest in a temple; Valerius Maximus does so as well. According to Ovid, the sanctuary belonged to Apollo, whilst Valerius Maximus attributed it to Asclepius. However, the latter recounts that the snake remained for three long days hanging from a palm tree in the temple's atrium. Through this tree, still a stranger in Italy, we feel transported to an Apollonian atmosphere. It reminds us of the palm tree of Delos, near which Apollo was born.16 In a sacred grove in northern Greece, snakes were bred to honour Apollo, as a 'toy' of the gods.17 The species of sacred snake of Asclepius, known as Coluber longissimus, was a tree snake that in the south reaches a length of up to two metres. Regarding it, in the descriptions of a snake lover,18 one can read: 'I admire the elegant movements of its slender body, the

shimmering head of a bronze-yellow hue which, as if it were a piece of gold chiselled by a goldsmith, rises and sinks restlessly, flicking its tongue". Such an animal, perched on a solar tree – this was the palm tree for the Greeks, its name phoinix linked to the sun because of its reddish colour – has very little that is chthonic about it, very little of the attribute that signifies the dark and subterranean.

Whether the sanctuary at Antium was dedicated to Asclepius or Apollo, it will soon become clear that this made no essential difference. Ovid was undoubtedly the best informed, as he had already mentioned a temple of Apollo in the port city of Antium before Asclepius's arrival in Rome. The boat journey, following the sacred visit to this temple, continues towards the mouth of the Tiber. There begins the god's solemn entry:

There a crowd rushes to greet him, the whole town gathered

from all quarters, matrons, senators, and even those who tend

your fire, Trojan Vesta, and with shouts of joy they greet the god.

And wherever the swift ship passes against the current,

the incense crackles on altars lined up in rows on both

banks and perfumes the air with its smoke,

and the sacrificed victims warm the knives that pierce them. He

had already entered the capital of the world, the city of Rome; the

serpent rears up, moves its neck supported by the tip

of the mast, and looks around for a suitable place to dwell. The

river divides into two branches, encircling a spot,

island is its name, and along each of the two banks

it extends two equal arms, with the land remaining in the

middle; there, disembarking from the Latin vessel, the

reptile, son of Phoebus, made his way, and regaining his

divine form, put an end

the plague, and his arrival restored health to Rome.

The serpent-like deity, whom Ovid calls the ‘Phoebica’,19 that is to say, the ‘Apollonian’, according to all legendary tradition, chose the Tiber Island as his seat of power. The devout Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161 AD) had a medallion struck to commemorate this event [fig. 8]. The choice of location, which was thus regarded as divine providence, must have had a deeper rationale than is commonly assumed. In antiquity, the choice of a specific place of worship was usually based on a religious event, which, as a rule, also found its justification in mythology. What was it that prompted the Romans to choose this island—which was certainly never considered a particularly healthy place—as a place of worship and as a spa dedicated to Asclepius? The banks of the Tiber, precisely at that spot, sank deeply, and extraordinary measures had to be taken time and again to prevent the island’s surroundings from becoming marshy ground. It is not yet a century20 since Bachofen observed this phenomenon, described by ancient sources. Even if the inscriptions referring to healings on the island21 were true, the geographical location clearly suggests that it was not hygienic but religious motives that determined the choice. The island in the Tiber was regarded as a religiously significant piece of land: according to Roman tradition, it was originally a floating island that had formed near the Fields of Mars from a special material—the grain of cereal that had been thrown into the river,22 originating from the sacred plant of the goddess Ceres. The link with Mars and the goddess Ceres points to the realm of death and the underworld. It is no coincidence that the Campus Martius was a sacred ground. After its formation, the island was consecrated to Faunus, an ancient Italic ‘wolf-god’. Since ‘Faunus’ means ‘strangler’,23 just as the name of his priests, ‘Luperci’, is merely a derivative of lupus, wolf.24 In the essence of the Faunus, the Romans recognised the Greek Pan, but with an additional, even wilder and more predatory trait, which expresses the

lobuno, the darkness that swallows everything. In one of the inscriptions, it is not Faunus who is named, but Vediovis alongside Asclepius on the island: (AESCV) lapio vediovi in insvla.25 Vediovis or Veiovis, the underworld Jupiter, who in the earliest Roman times represented that Greek Apollo who sent both plague and healing. Near Rome, on Mount Soracte, this god of the underworld—who was also equated there with Apollo and known as Soranus—was worshipped by the priests, who in the Sabine language were called hirpi, 'wolves'.26 Moreover, furthermore, there was no lack of connection with fire, that is, with purifying fire: the Hirpi Sorani leap over the fire. An Italian Apollo, a deity of great ambiguity in his deadly and healing effects, belongs to the Tiber Island.27 He corresponds, however, to the Greek form of the god who draws his bow in the Iliad, when he is invoked by the Vestal Virgins as Apollo Medicus, Paean Apollo, and when, 'for the maintenance of the people's health', a specific temple is erected for him.28

When one enters the Tiber Island via the bridge adorned with ancient Hermes figures, in the manner of the ancient Romans—those who had brought the serpent from Epidaurus—one must feel somewhat like a visitor to the underworld. The serpent of Asclepius, alongside Faunus, was meant to illuminate a nocturnal, wolf-like world here, and yet, in some way, to embody the warm light of life with its cold body: a paradox that repeatedly imposes itself upon us in the course of these observations. In the cult of Asclepius, as Rome knew it on the Tiber Island, the boundaries between the chthonic-mortal and the flashes of the mysterious solar radiance are blurred, almost in a disturbing way, for those who might wish to cling to Schiller's Greek deities, though perhaps somewhat less to the physician; mysterious to those accustomed to a certain twilight of life and death, and also to more hygienic spaces, rather than the ancient island's places of worship.

HEALINGS IN EPIDAURUS

When some travellers heading to Greece wish to visit Epidaurus, they do not actually enter the small village, which is commonly known as Epidavra. Above all, they go to visit—both now and in ancient times—the place of worship situated to the north of the village, nine kilometres away, which is popularly known as tò Jeró, that is, tò Hierón, 'the sanctuary'. Nowadays, however, one no longer travels there as in ancient times, from the small port town, as Ovid put it, 'laboriously to the temple', nor does one rarely set out from Argos, as the guide Pausanias did when he made his journey in the mid-2nd century AD; instead, one uses the modern road from Nafplio, the capital of the Argolis region. Most visitors wish to make a quick visit to this major archaeological site in the eastern Peloponnese, which is the most famous and important after Olympia in the western Peloponnese.

These two sanctuaries have something in common. After the road to Epidaurus first takes the traveller through a monotonous region of scrubland, then curves below the village of Ligurio, there is a surprising bend that brings us, now on Epidaurus soil, not into a town—as is the case in Olympia—but into a secluded, solemn and dreamlike valley. It is a
'sacred grove' which, in its seclusion, perhaps preserves its original state even better than the festival grounds of Mount Olympus, which are more extensive and offer a wide-open gateway to everyday human life. However, the landscape character of the two places of worship lies, rather than in their isolation, in the creation of a distinct religious sphere, shaped by the chosen site and type of building, and centred in the middle of a valley [fig. 9]. In Olympia, at the very top, where one would expect to find, on a mountain or at least on a hill, the enthroned seat of the Olympian sovereign, it is surprising that the temple of Zeus is situated on the plain of the Alpheios. A place like this seems more suited to Asclepius with his cult of snakes, and for this reason we are far less surprised by the site chosen to build his famous temple. Certainly, the similar location of the two sanctuaries leads us to consider other common links. Olympia also concealed, in a cave at the foot of the

Mount Cronos, a snake cult: the cult of the divine child transformed into a snake, Sosipolis, the Saviour.29

The temple of the Epidaurians, whose foundations are now exposed, was built in imitation of the temple of Zeus at Olympia. The artists who had adorned the temple of Asclepius with images not only followed the same artistic style, but also sought to express something in common which, it seems, lay at the heart of the two deities. In both temples stood the enthroned statue of a solemn, bearded god, set upon a floor of black stone from Eleusis; though in Epidaurus his solemnity and the darkness of his essence were emphasised even more. One of the temple's pediments, as in that of Olympia, depicted sombre centaurs, although there they appeared on the west side, whilst in Epidaurus the fragments of a struggle between centaurs were on the east pediment, and the west one was adorned with a scene of Amazons. The similarities in the ornamentation of the two temples, and the artistic harmony in the presentation of the deities in both Epidaurus and Olympia, seem to indicate the same thing as was expressed by the cult of Asclepius in Pergamon, with the designation of a 'Zeus Asclepius'. This designation also appears in Epidaurus and in the neighbouring city of Hermione.

When we arrive, then, at Epidaurus, in the same frame of mind that overtakes us at Olympia, we recall that imposing marble head, which we are probably all familiar with, and which some archaeologists maintain belongs to a statue of Zeus, whilst others attribute it to Asclepius [fig. 11].30 The head was found in a cave on the island of Melos, a sanctuary in a grotto dedicated to Asclepius and Hygieia. In the grotto there was also a round plinth bearing the goddess's name, as well as various fragments of several statuettes of Hygieia and one of a bent leg, a votive offering dedicated to both deities. And if there were still scholars who, despite these findings, believed they recognised a head of Zeus in the gigantic head of Melos, this can be explained by the fact that, in terms of its typology, it corresponds to an ideal of the gods, ultimately deriving from the image of the Olympian Zeus created by Phidias. The cult image of the temple at Epidaurus differed from this, firstly, in the presence of a snake and a dog depicted beside the throne of Asclepius. From the imitations found at Epidaurus [fig. 12], we can get an idea of the dignity of the seated god. Viewed up close, one can appreciate the

There is a significant difference between the face of Asclepius and the head of Zeus. The colossal head from Melos could be definitively attributed to Asclepius, as it shares the same features as a votive statuette found at Epidaurus and has a facial expression, such as the one reproduced here [fig. 13], which cannot belong to any other Greek deity. The distant gaze – thus was this characteristic feature of the ideal of Asclepius described –31 'without resting on any specific object, wanders into the distance, and makes us feel, in connection with its lively movement, the immediate sensation of a strong inner agitation, not without a certain suffering, which dominates the god. It is not an Olympian serenity with which he appears before us: it is the very one who is, so to speak, pursued by the sufferings of men, which his office is meant to alleviate". However, we must not believe that the oldest statue of the seated Asclepius was depicted with such a moved expression: the poignant expression, rather than Thrasymedes, is attributed to Scopas, the creator of the cult image of the god on the throne of Epidaurus. But it is true that, since the creation of that ideal image of Asclepius, a divine, kind and humanitarian countenance has hovered over the sacred valley.

Who, then, was the ruler of this sanctuary nestled amongst mountains and forests, this enigmatic god whose classical appearance bore such a striking resemblance to Zeus? His temple – whose foundations we can still clearly make out [fig. 14] – was situated within an elongated, rectangular walled enclosure, though not at its centre [fig. 10], as is the case with most of the famous abodes of the Greek gods. What distinguished this sacred area from most of the structures of distinguished temples was the large double hall with columns on the north side, the western half of which consisted of two storeys.32 The large double hall was designed to accommodate the sick who had come to Epidaurus to sleep in the sanctuary; it is uncertain whether that was the actual site intended as the 'temple dormitory'. Countless votive tablets adorned the interior wall of that space, where the official lists of cures were also carved; Pausanias was still able to see six plaques with inscriptions, three of which were found during the excavations. The first tablet invokes the 'god' and 'good fortune', followed by the words: 'Healings of Apollo and Asclepius'.33 This does not seem to tally with the content of the reports, since Apollo is never mentioned in them,

but always only Asclepius. And so we ask ourselves, then, who was the true god: was it Apollo or was it Asclepius?

The cures recorded in the tables also present a puzzle, albeit a more common one. They pose the same problem as most of the ‘miraculous healings’ reported by the many Christian pilgrimage churches in southern or central Europe. They are only ‘miraculous’ insofar as every cure, every happy outcome, is a kind of miracle where there was also the possibility of misfortune occurring. The shift towards recovery from a serious illness in a person facing death—whom, by their very nature, we might also call a mortal being—even if the doctor can diagnose and cure them, always strikes us as something inconceivable. For within the patient, for healing to occur,34 in addition to the effects brought about by medicines, there must always be something else acting in parallel and in conjunction with the external intervention. At the decisive moment in the process of change towards healing, another factor intervenes which, quite rightly, could be compared to the flow of a spring. Popular Christian belief attributes this event to the intervention of the relevant saint, or to a figure protected by God’s grace. According to this belief, God is the ultimate cause of healing, even though He has no specific role in the healing process itself: He changes everything, if He wills it, and ensures that all things turn out for the best. And the saint merely remains present whilst the change takes place. The essence of a god characterised as a healing god is represented by the fact that the water from that spring flowed from him. He is not merely present in the healing, but his appearance represents healing in itself, and perhaps also the reverse: in a way, every healing represents his epiphany.

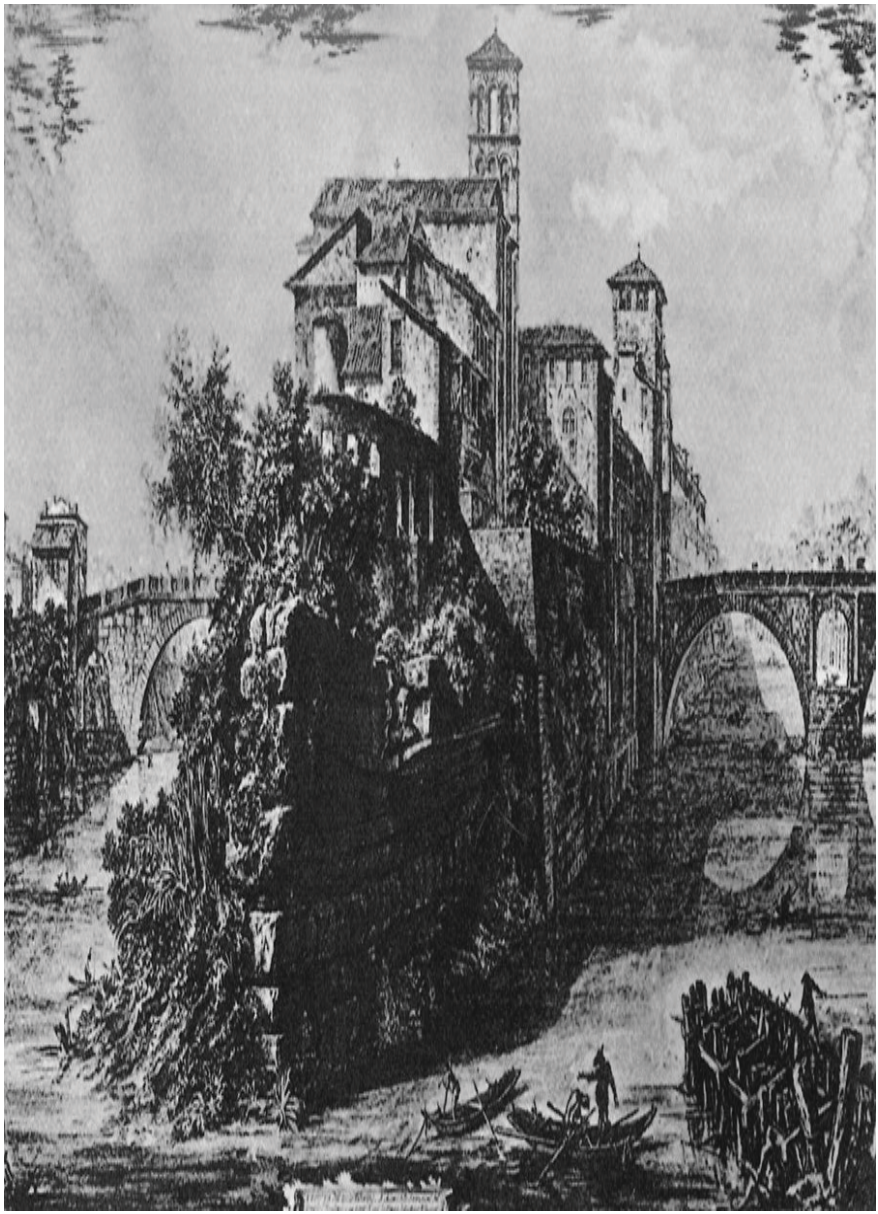
Healings at Epidaurus are therefore no more enigmatic than healings elsewhere, for it is the act of healing itself that is enigmatic. One of the fundamental enigmas at Epidaurus is that of determining who is the
‘god’ whose epiphany signifies the shift towards healing. Until now we have spoken only of Asclepius or Zeus Asclepius. In Rome we certainly had a ‘wolf-god’ Apollo and an ‘underworld Jupiter’, Veiovis, closely linked to Asclepius. How did the Greeks recognise the healing god and what did they call him? The guardians of the sanctuary, when they hailed
‘god’, they were thinking of Apollo and Asclepius: both were mentioned in the

epigraph of the healings, but only Asclepius is named as the healer. Given the sacred nature of the place, we must not regard this as an oversight, as an inconsistency35 towards Apollo committed for the sake of external purposes and considerations. He, being the greatest, had no need to take possession of a place that in a very special way belonged to his son Asclepius. How many sacred sites in Greece did not belong to him! And among these, to a certain extent, Epidaurus was already counted as a region. Following the comparison with Olympia, mention is also made of those whose characteristics recall the most renowned and sacred Apollonian sanctuaries.

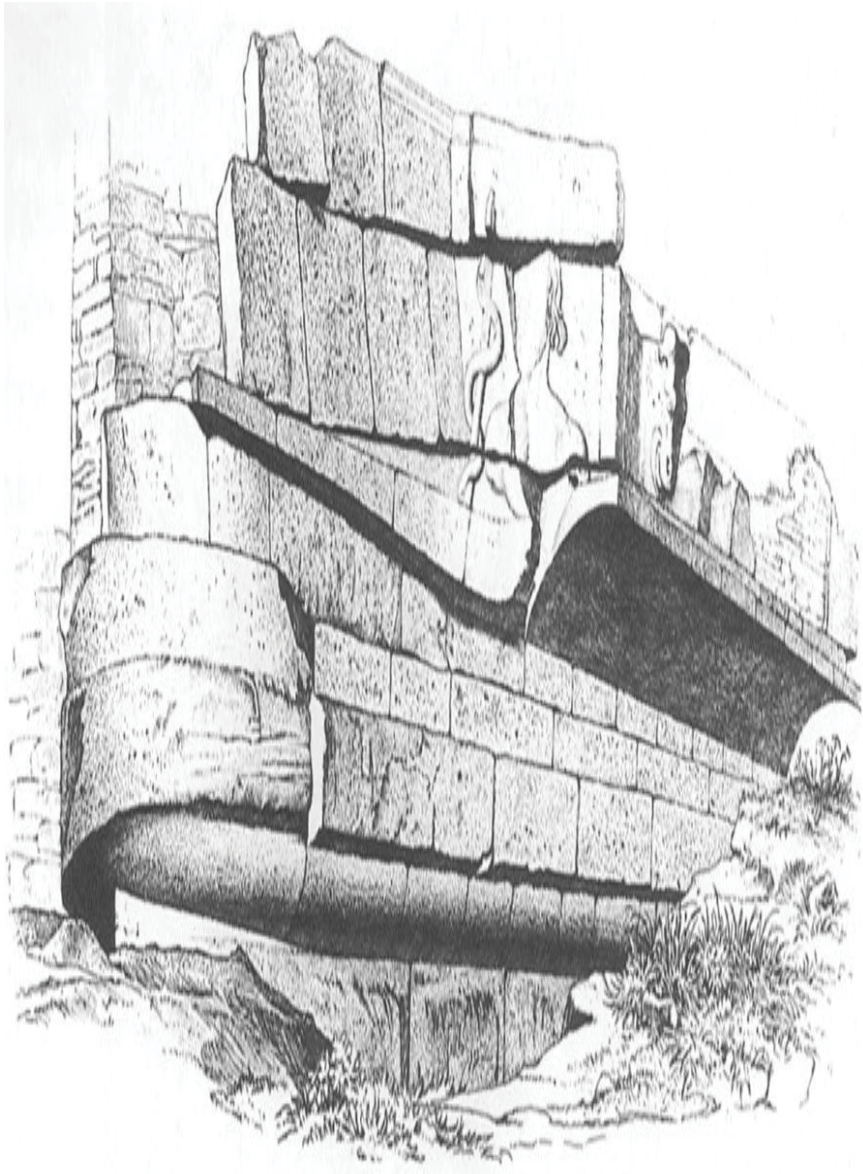
Consider the location of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: it was built in a deep hollow, presumably over a cleft in the rock. The Kassotis spring flows through the temple's foundations. At Epidaurus, Pausanias was told of a spring flowing beneath the cult image. However, as the excavators did not find it in the indicated location, this may have been because it had been diverted from the outside to the inside. The abundance of water flowing from all the spring's installations was an important element for the atmosphere and life within the sanctuary. Consider Delphi once more, with the power of its Kastalia spring alongside the Kassotis. For the Greeks, water represented a kind of link to the depths of the earth. And since in ancient times one almost always travelled from the port city of Epidaurus to the sanctuary along what is now a bridle path, the same thing happened as in Delphi: having left the port, one entered the hollow to reach the sacred place in the depths of the earth, a place far more subterranean than at Olympia…

In Epidaurus, Apollo was known by the epithet Maleatas and was worshipped near Mount Kynortion, in the south-western corner of the valley's amphitheatre, in a small, distinctive sanctuary. The name Kynortion is derived from the Greek words for 'dog' and 'ascent'. Just as the serpent reigned supreme in the lower sanctuary, here above it seems the dog did so. But Apollo was also represented in the lower sanctuary, in the valley. The inscribed poems of Isilo, a fourth-century Epidaurian,36 tell us that a certain Malos had been the first to build an altar to Apollo Maleatas, and that he had offered sacrifices to him. This altar was apparently situated near the entrance to the great sanctuary, as Isilo included it, also in Tricca, in

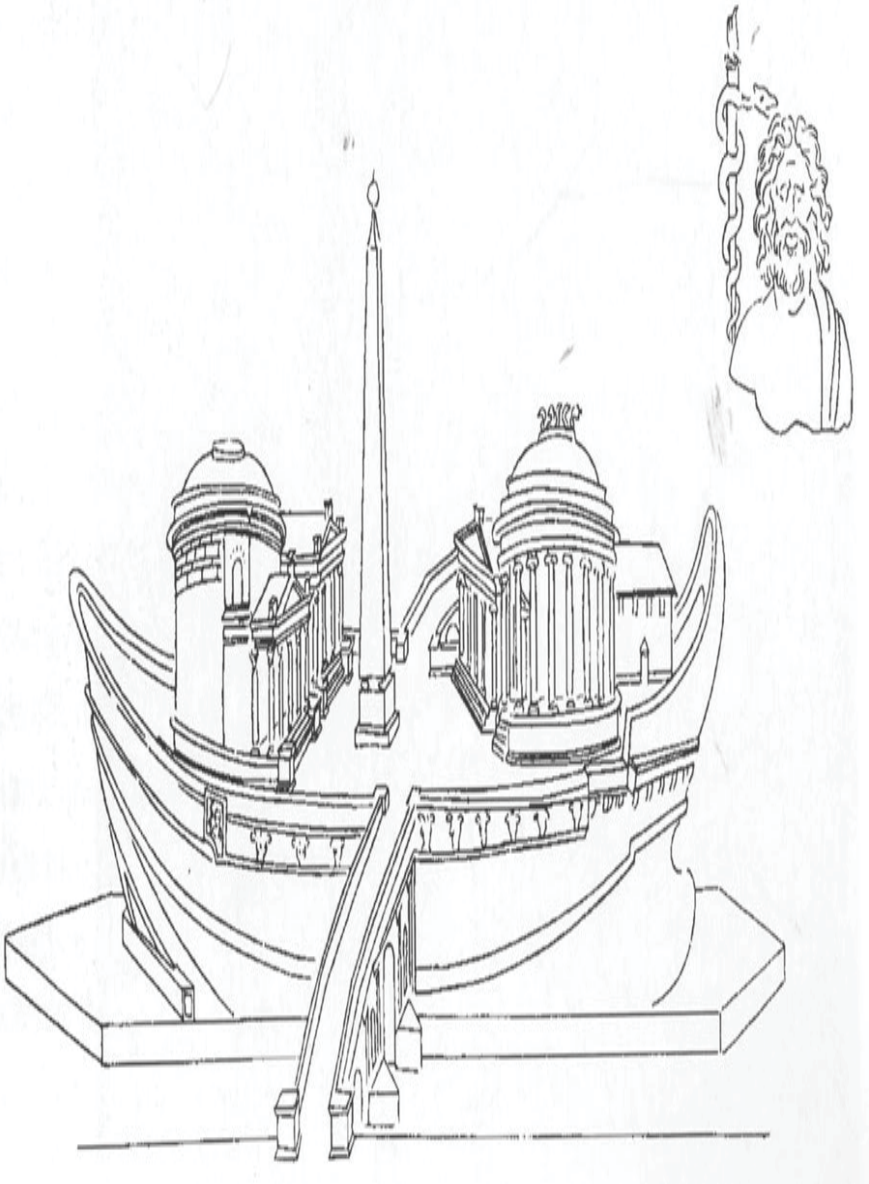
the most famous sanctuary of Asclepius in Thessaly, where sacrifices were first offered to Apollo Maleatas. In the cult, therefore, Apollo comes first, and to put it in mythological terms, he is the ‘father’. Another version[37] recounts the arrival in Epidaurus of Phlegias, a warrior king of Thessaly, accompanied by his daughter, a lover of Apollo, who was already pregnant and carried Asclepius in her womb. She abandoned her son on the summit of a mountain, which in those days was called Mount Mirtio, and later
‘Monte del Mamelón’. There, between a goat and a dog, the shepherd Arestanas finds him: the goat nurses him, the dog guards the child who, enveloped in a blinding light, compels the shepherd to turn as though he were in the presence of a divine being. At that very moment, a voice is heard proclaiming across land and sea that the newborn will find all the remedies for the sick and the power to raise the dead. Isilo, with his solemn hymns in honour of Apollo and Asclepius, also recounts the story of the divine birth at Epidaurus, but his account, richer in mythological references and allusions, resolves the enigma of father and son, though it confronts us with the enigma of the mother.



1. Tiber Island, in Rome, before the 19th century

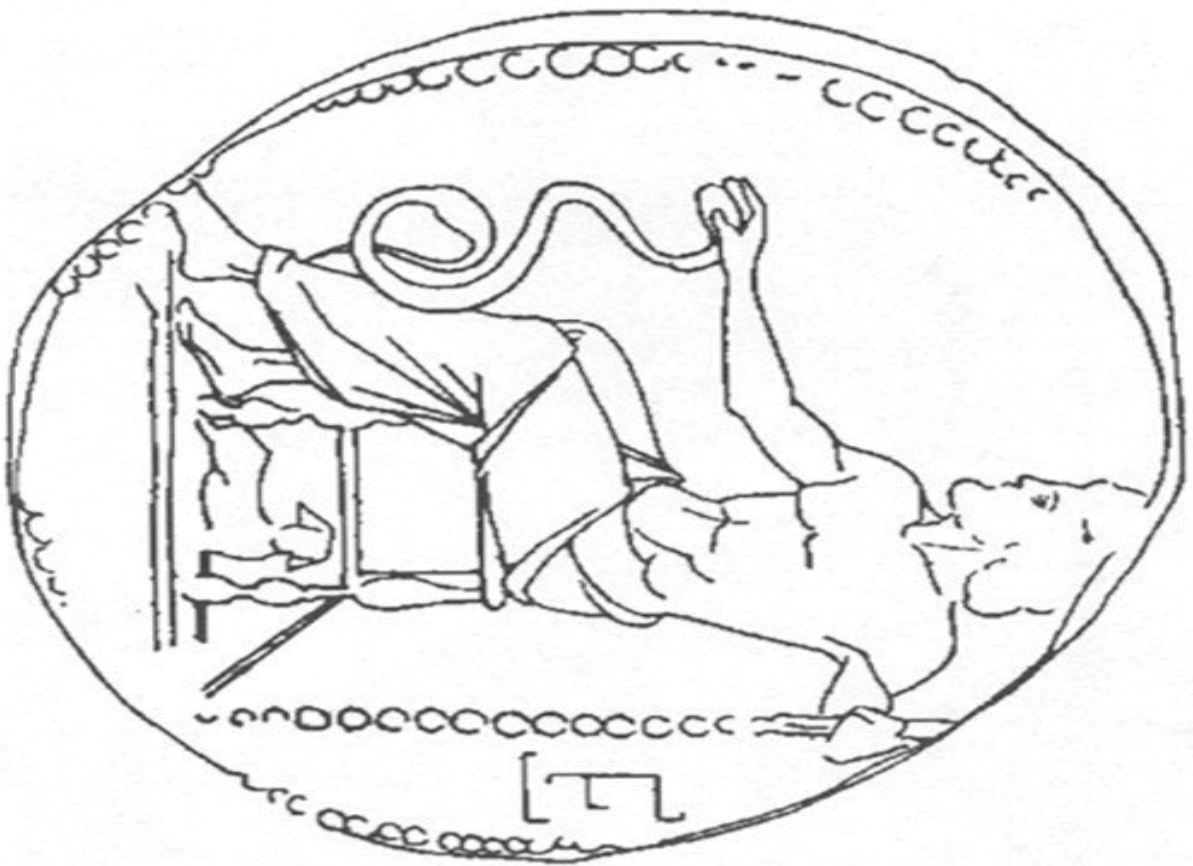


2. The modern remains of the ancient, boat-shaped embankment of Tiber Island



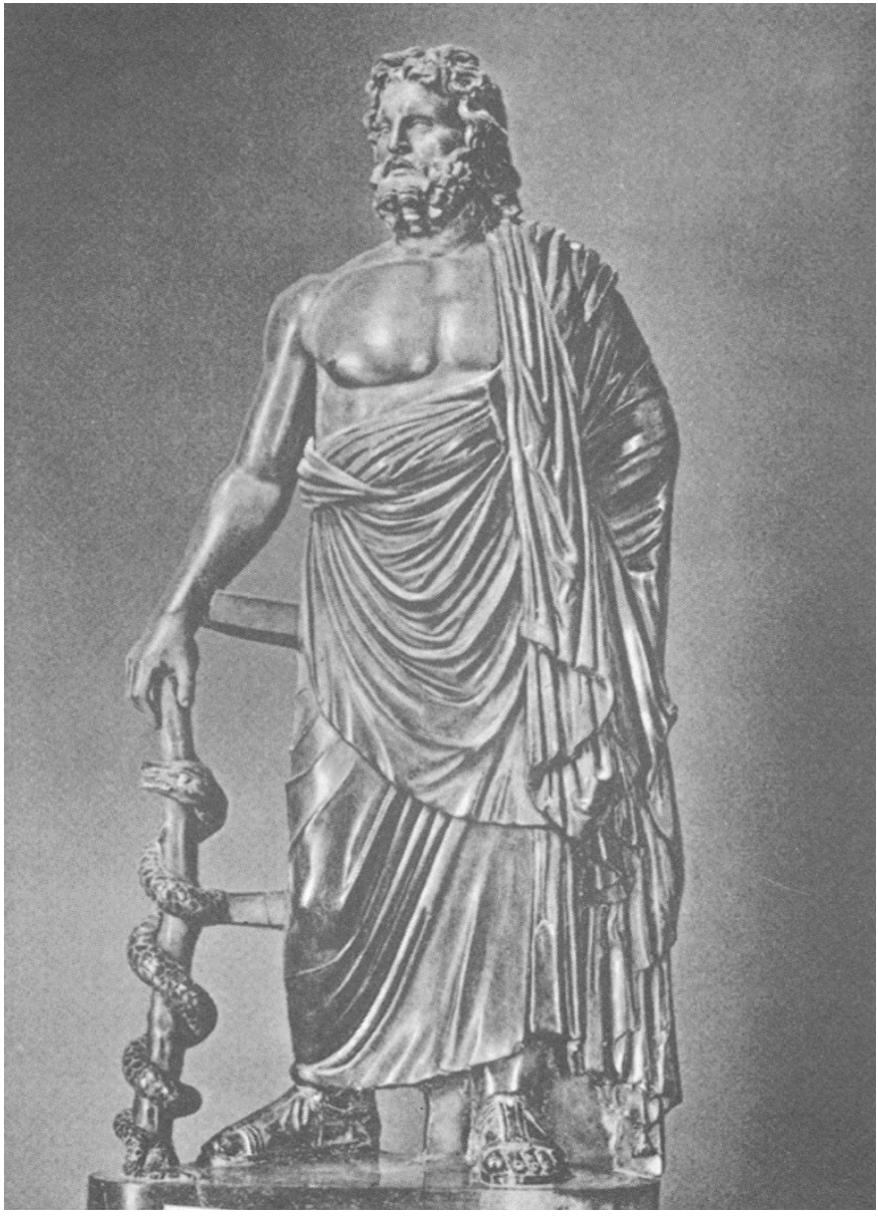
3. Reconstruction of the island’s ancient shape

4. The Belvedere Apollo



5. Silver coin from Epidaurus, 350 BC

6. The serpent of the enthroned Asclepius

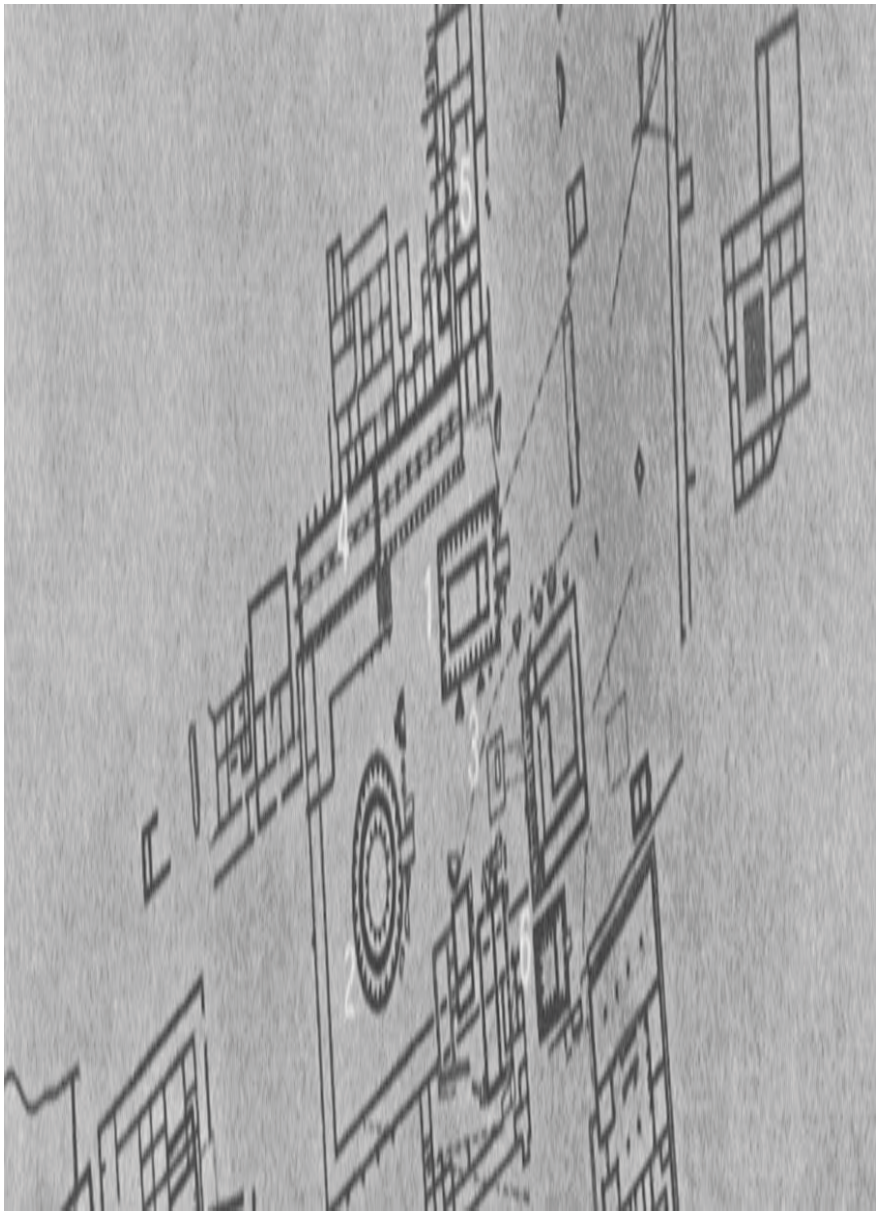


7. Aesculapii of Porto d’Anzio

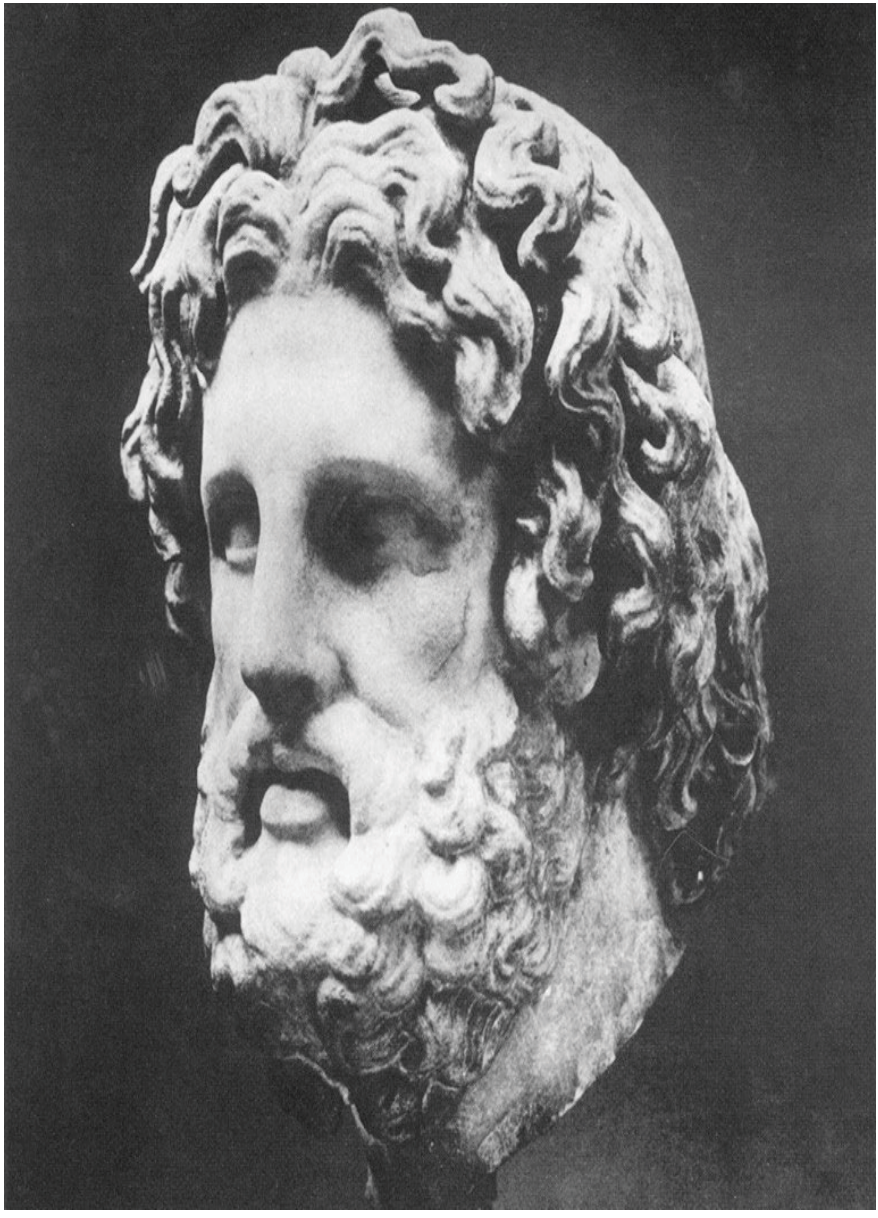
8. The arrival of the serpent of Asclepius on Tiber Island

1
2
3
4
5
6

9. Site plan of the sanctuary at Epidaurus: 1 Asclepeion, 2 Gymnasium, 3 Stadium, 4 Theatre, 5 Katagogion, 6 Kynortion

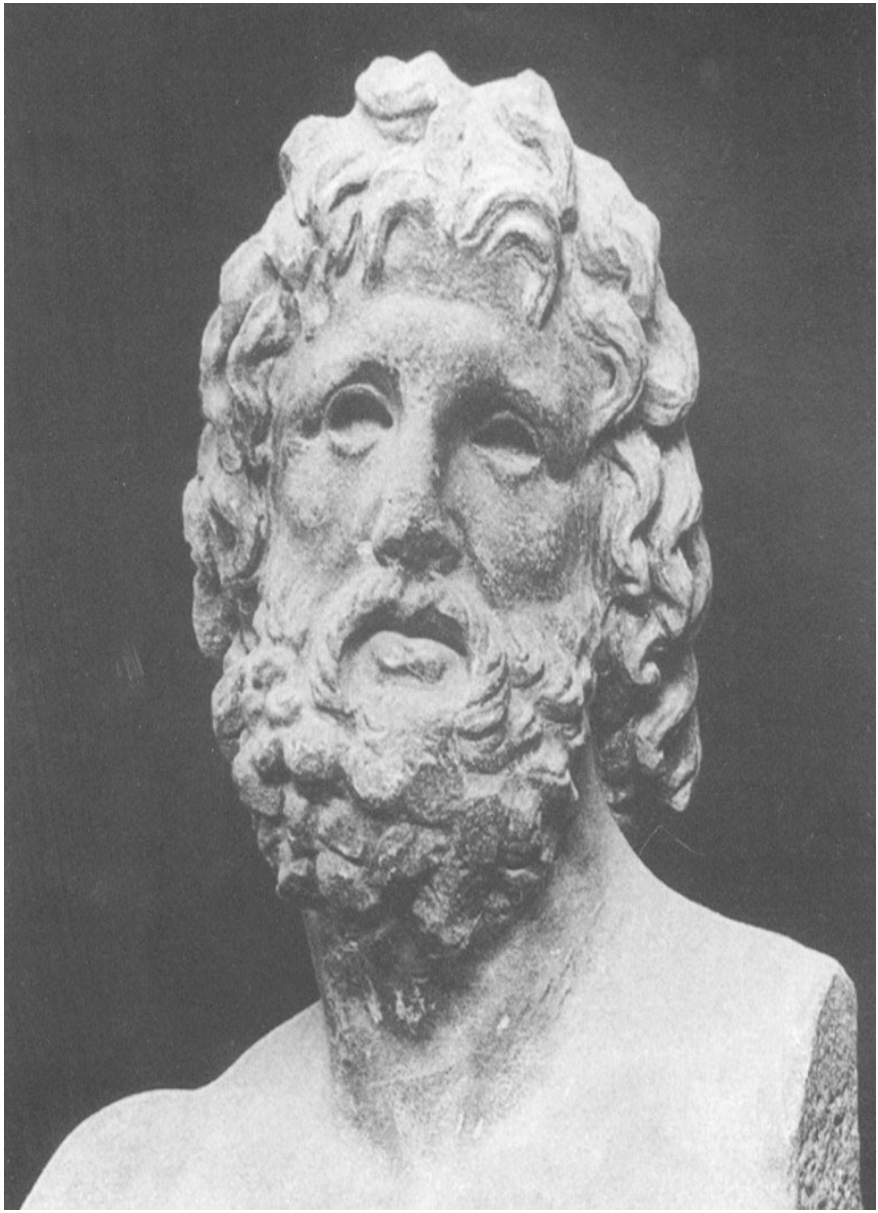


10. Plan of the sanctuary at Epidaurus: 1 Temple of Asclepius, 2 Stoa, 3 Great Altar, 4 Colonnades, 5 Baths, 6 Temple of Artemis



11. Head of Asclepius from the island of Melos

12. Relief from the sanctuary at Epidaurus

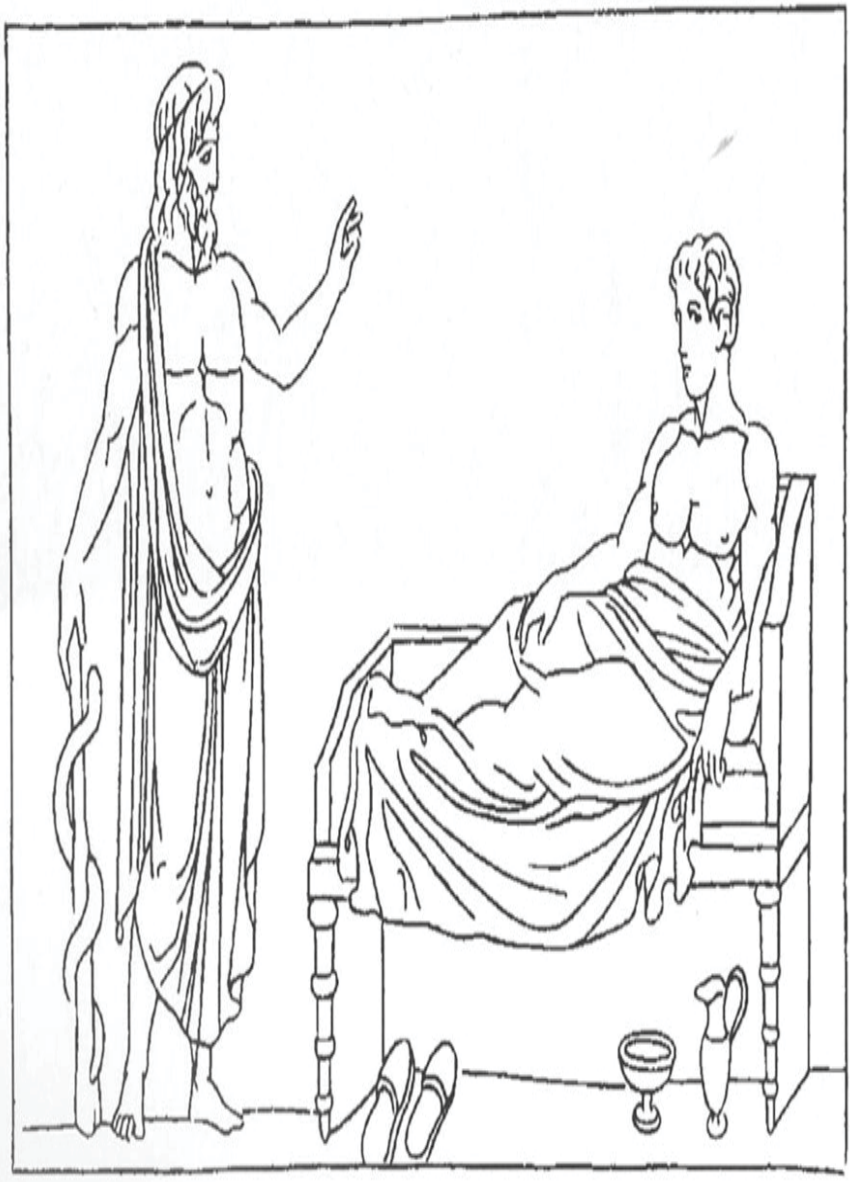


13. Fragment of a statue of Asclepius

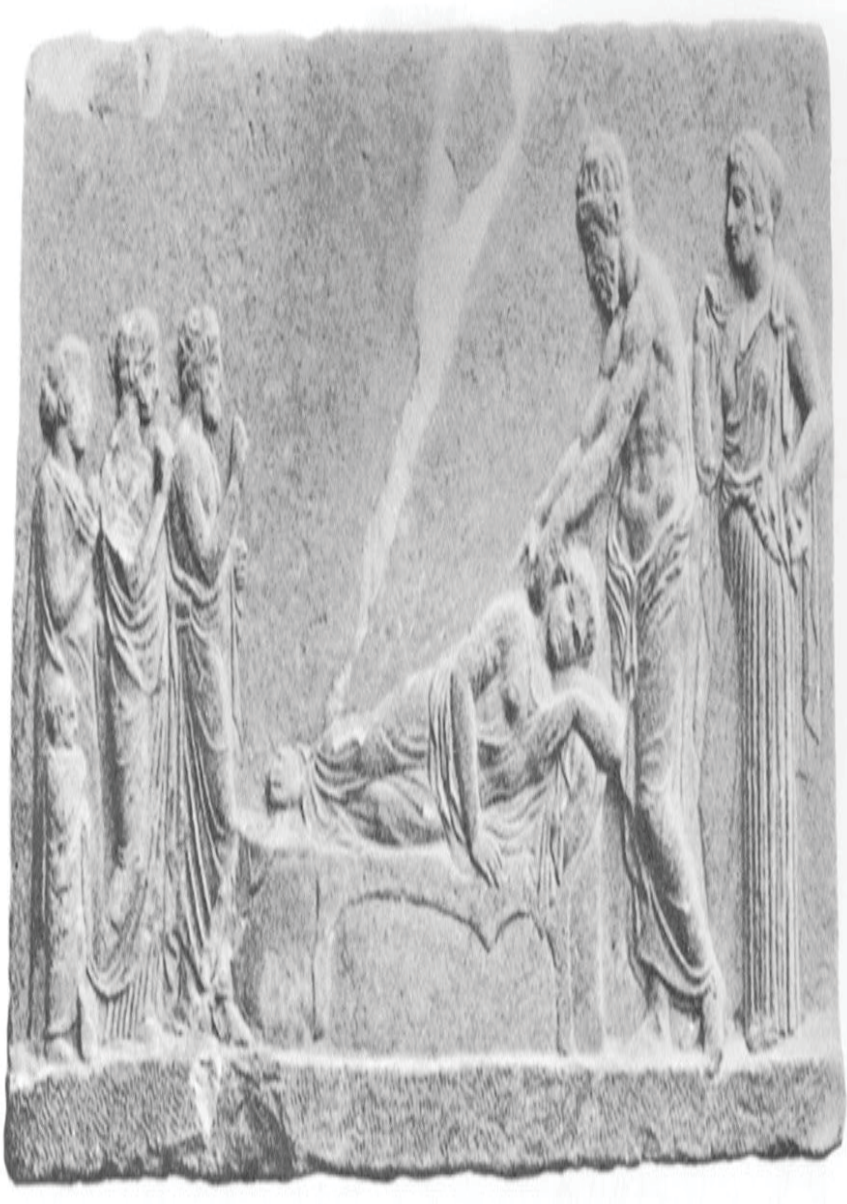
14. View towards the south-east of Mount Kynortion, from the sacred area of Epidaurus

15. Sacred relief from Epidaurus

16. Votive relief from the Asclepeion in Athens



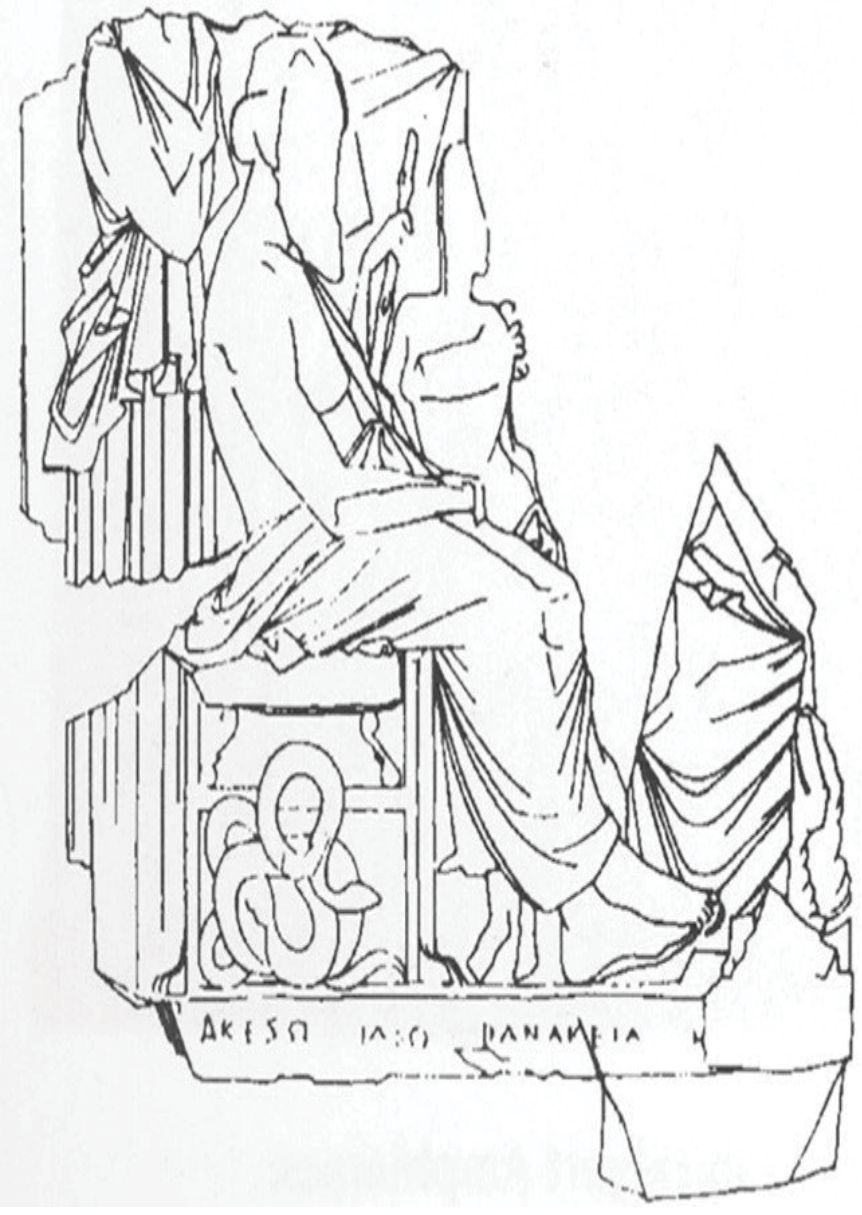
17. Asclepius appears to the sick man



18. Sacred relief dedicated to Asclepius, at the sanctuary of Asclepius in Piraeus

19. Sacred relief of Archinos dedicated to the oracular god Amphiaraos

20. Asclepius depicted as a young traveller


ΑΚΕΣΩ ΙΑΣΩ ΠΑΝΑΚΕΙΑ

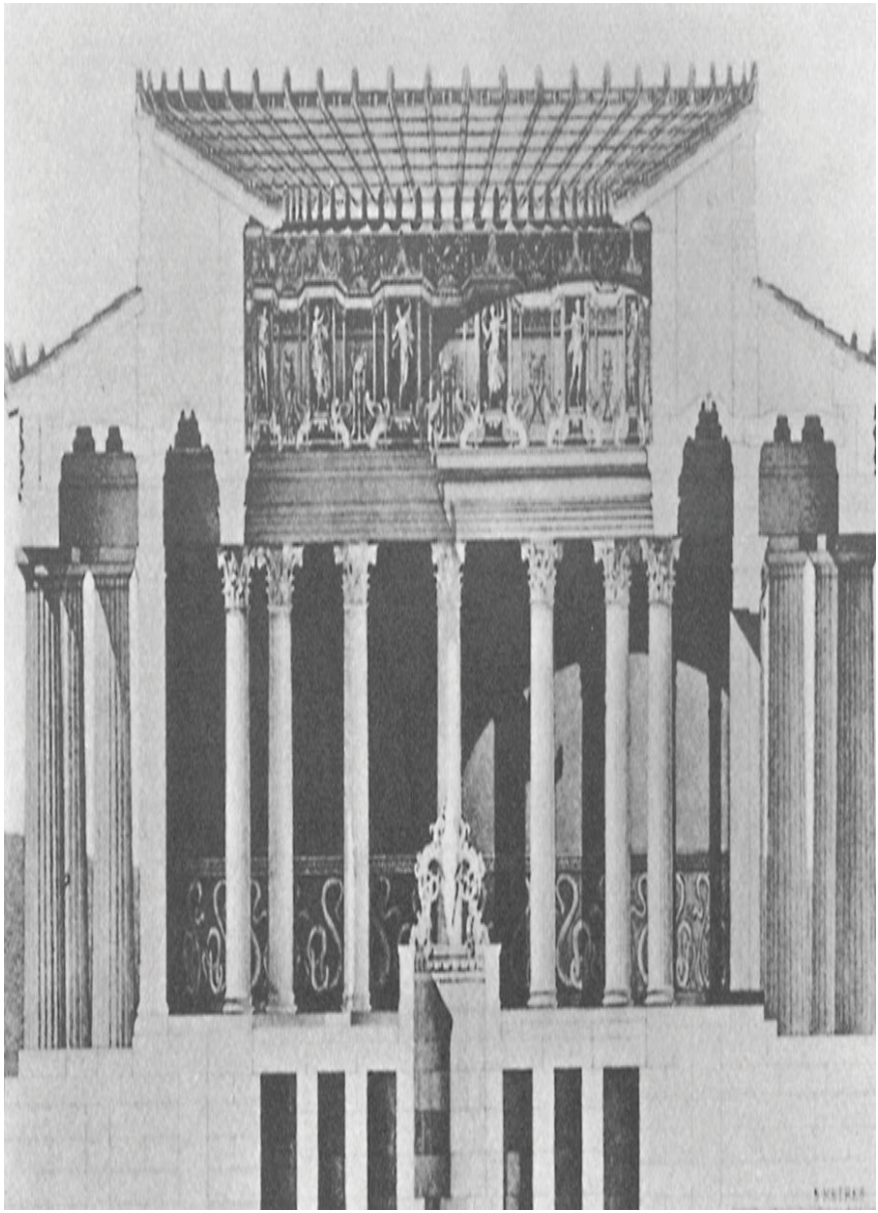
21. Cult relief dedicated to Asclepius

22. Relief depicting initiation rituals before the so-called Lovatelli Urn

23. Fragment of a cultic relief depicting Asclepius wearing a Dionysian headdress

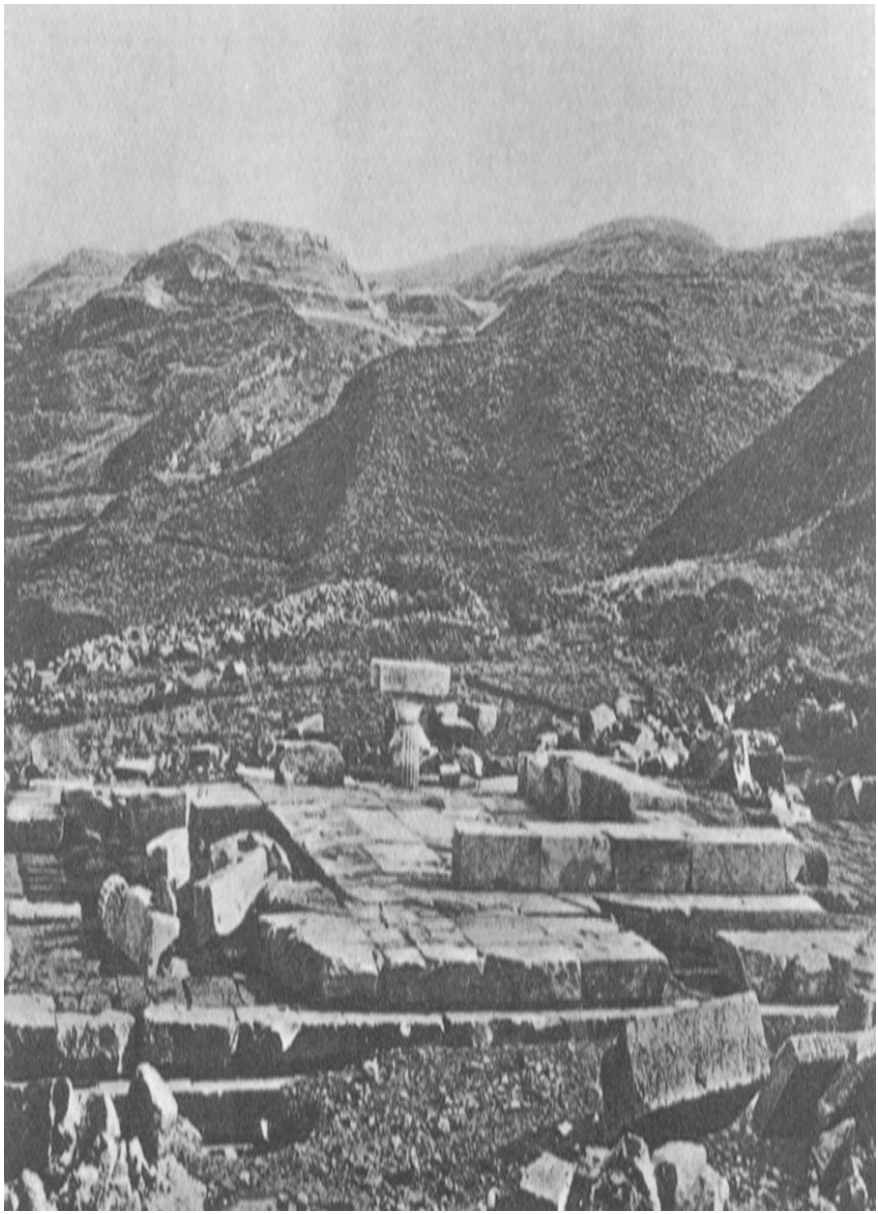
24a and 24b. View of the Asclepeion of Athens, on the southern slope of the Acropolis

25. Labyrinth-shaped foundations of a tholos (circular building) at the sanctuary of Epidaurus



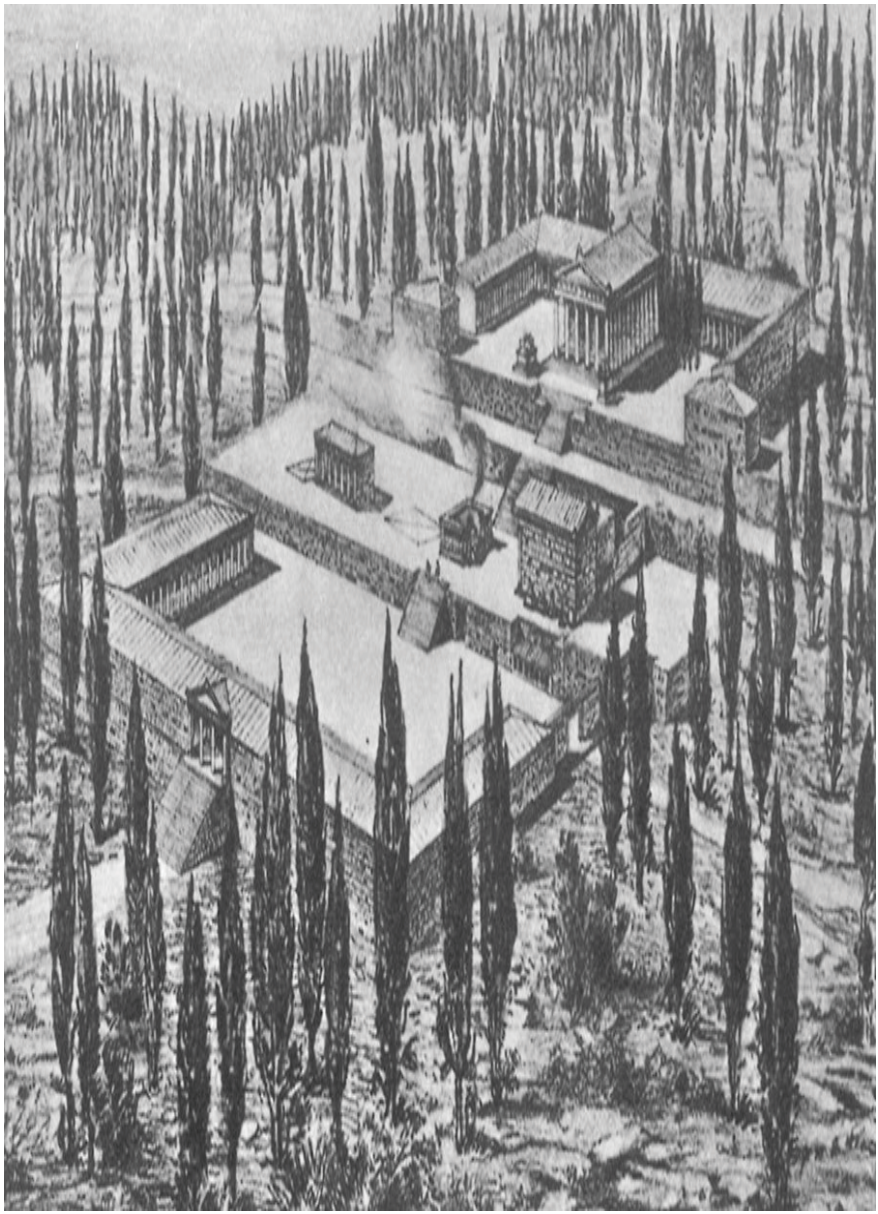
26. Cross-section of a reconstructed Tolo

27. The Asclepieion of Pergamon



28. View of the outline of the Asclepeion of Cos

29. Central terrace of the Asclepieion of Kos



30. The Asclepieion of Kos in Hellenic times

Malos, a primordial man, whom Zeus united in sacred marriage with an Apollonian maiden, the muse Erato, in turn becomes the father of a daughter who will be a muse, Cleope, 'herald of glory'. Phlegias, a native of Epidaurus, marries Cleope. At this point in the narrative the words appear: 'And from Phlegias she was begotten, and her name is Egle – this was her epithet – because of her beauty she was called by the epithet Coronis'.[38] Isilo deliberately hesitates whilst speaking of Apollo's future bride; he does so haltingly, because he cannot reveal her true name. Coronis could only be named – 'because of her beauty' – as a dark-haired maiden; the name 'Coronis' evokes the Greek word for 'crow'.39 But she is also called Egle, 'the luminous one', a word identical to 'light' and 'glow' in Greek: αἴγλη. The creature that later shines in the sanctuary 'takes the name of his mother, Egle, and the epithet Asclepio from Apollo'.40 This name and epithet – Egle and Asclepio – are indeed related; the transitional forms have been demonstrated, and the phonetic shift, strange as it may seem, must be accepted.41 The cause of the irregularity is due to the influence of a pre-Greek, archaic Mediterranean language. With the epithet of Apollo, some derivatives of αἴγλη appear. On the island of Anaphe, so named for the 'flames', Apollo Aigletes, the 'Apollo of Light', 'shone' upon the Argonauts. On Anaphe itself, Aigletes was known as 'Asgelatas'. And this corresponds phonetically to the word 'Asclepius'. According to its meaning, it is also equated with 'Aiglaer' and 'Aglaopes', terms clearly referring to luminous beings. For the religious and conscientious Isilo, Asclepius is merely a nickname of the god Epiklesis. For him, the nickname expresses the same as Pausanias' account of the luminous epiphany of the divine child. The luminous Apollo, the fertiliser of a mother in chiaroscuro: that is to say, Asclepius, according to this mythological motif. The close relationship between the Apollo-Asclepius pair, so often recorded and attested in Epidaurus,42 is due to the union of the greater god (Apollo) with one of his aspects (Asclepius), a union which on the island of Anaphe was long maintained as 'Apollo Aigletes' or 'Apollo Asgelatas'.

The luminous Apollo appears in Epidaurus as Asclepius. However, one should not think merely of the appearance of an external light, or of a simple emergence

of the sun. That Apollo Maleatas is worshipped from the heights overlooking the valley, on the eastern side, is by no means a coincidence, nor is it a coincidence that the boy Asclepius, up there on the heights, is illuminated above the valley as if he were the rising sun. The dog, after which the mountain is named Kynortion, can also signify ‘golden’ in Greek mythology.43 The wolf, a relative of the dog facing the darkness, is sacred to Apollo, whom we knew in Italy as a ‘wolf-god’, and to whom wolves were even sacrificed on the altar at Argos,44 whilst at Delphi, before his altar,45 rests the blessed offering of an iron wolf. Asclepius, depicted as a child guarded by a dog, and as a healing god accompanied by dogs [fig. 15], seems to represent, in contrast to Maleatas, another, brighter aspect of Apollo. Broadly speaking, it can be said that the ‘father’, in mythology, is always ‘darker’ than the ‘son’. ‘Maleatas’ means ‘he of Malea’, and Malea, as the name of a mountain in the south of the Peloponnese, is associated with figures of horses or goats, gloomy and procreative deities: such as Poseidon, Chiron and Silenus.46 The paternal side may be associated with such creatures, but only that of Apollo. In the list of deities at a sanctuary of Asclepius,47 Maleatas is mentioned as a special divine figure and is cited before Apollo, as if one did not wish to name Apollo by this dark name. Zeus, on the other hand, compared to Apollo and as a father, would be regarded as the dark one. Zeus appears in Asclepius once again as this ‘father’, but not the Olympian one, rather the ‘underworld Zeus’: a darkness added even to the most resplendent illumination, a gentle and serious characteristic, which is not typical of the true sunrise, but rather of the god who appears in the dreams of the sick.

And just as the true sunrise endures, so too do true births and authentic deaths, and that which must follow: the resurrection of the dead, apart from the events that took place on that dark night at the sanctuary of Epidaurus. According to Isilo, the birth of Asclepius took place in the sanctuary itself. However, in the space set aside for healing, only a divine birth could take place; only the epiphanies of the healing god were permitted. Women in labour were excluded from the sacred area, as pregnancy was not considered an illness requiring healing. Nor was it permitted to bring the dying to the sanctuary. It was not until the time of the Roman Empire, when the cult was no longer oriented solely towards divine events, that the healing process and Epidaurus became a

kind of health resort, a place of medical healing in the broadest sense of the term, and it was then that a hall for women in labour and the dying was built on the outskirts of the sanctuary. As for the resurrection of the dead, according to the extensive account heralded by the birth of Asclepius, nothing is mentioned in the reports of healings, which, on the other hand, were replete with 'miracles'. Mythology, on the other hand, does recount Asclepius's resurrections, and also speaks of his own death, which was inflicted upon him as a punishment for this very reason.48 At Epidaurus, not a single legend concerning resurrection was found, nor was there any account describing the god's death. Nor is there any mention of the death of a sick person. And it would also be pointless to include among the accounts of epiphany those cases that had none. If, on the contrary, the resurrection of a dead person in Epidaurus had made sense, it would have been very easy to invent an epiphany.

The healing process is not really the rising of the sun; it is merely one way of emerging from the sun; it is not the actual birth of man, nor the resurrection of the dead, but an event that somehow takes place in a borderland with the realm of the dead. The dog – when accompanying the phantasmagorical goddess Hecate – is also an underworld creature, yet it likewise heralds the appearance of light, and here seems to describe a transitional situation: the transition between below and above, between night and day, between death and life. The best-known sacred animal of Asclepius is the serpent, and it belongs to the same category. The equation of dog and serpent, the merging of one into the figure of the other and its significance in the imagery of Greek underworld mythology is striking enough. 'Serpents too,' says an expert on ancient words, 'are dogs.'49 The equation can only be understood in the sense that both animals are capable of expressing the same content of the soul. In animal symbols, the geographical scope of application and the habitat of the corresponding animals originally coincided. Migrating peoples carry with them, as symbols, the images of memories of the animal world of their former homeland, as well as their domestic animals. Thus it came to pass that the dog, a rather Nordic symbol, was placed alongside the serpent, which, after the Greeks had settled in a land richer in serpents, is chiefly the symbol of a southern animal. It is the same phenomenon as the emergence of the billy-goat in the cult of the wolf-priests

the Romans, the ‘Luperci’,50 or the shift from the bear to the lion in the cult and mythological tradition of the goddess Artemis.

Dog and snake, both offered by nature itself as forms of expression51 of the same state of life—that of a state of healing which is already close to the realm of the dead—appear in the same healing role, according to the accounts from Epidaurus. ‘A dog heals a boy from Aegina,’ reads one tablet.52 ‘He had a tumour near his neck. When he came before the god, one of the sacred guard dogs looked after him, and with its tongue healed him.” And this account pertains to another:53 “A snake healed a man’s toes. He was seriously ill due to a malignant ulcer on his toes. During the day, the servants would carry him out, seated in an armchair. When sleep overcame him, a snake would come from the innermost chamber of the sanctuary and heal his toes with its tongue, and after doing so would return to the same place. When the man awoke and felt healed, he said he had seen the face of a beautiful young man who was rubbing ointment on his foot.”

These kinds of miraculous accounts, with their strict distinction between dreams and events occurring outside of dreams, are presented as ‘true stories’ that took place in the sanctuary. In fact, among the descriptions, there are also accounts of events that, in the light of day, might be true, such as, for example, the healing of a mute girl:54 ‘As she was running about the sanctuary, she saw a snake slithering up one of the trees in the grove [fig. 16]. Terrified, she immediately cried out to her mother and father, and walked away healed.” Nevertheless, these animal stories must generally be interpreted as dreams. Through the sacred animals, a situation is recalled in which the living manifests itself on the threshold of death; it manifests itself – to bring us, through words, closer to the accumulation of contradictions in reality – as a dark and cold layer, and at the same time moves warmly and goldenly beneath an unmistakable and radiant daytime world, thus achieving the miracle of healing. The appearance of the beautiful young man as a healer in the healing through the serpent is, in a way, a dream within a dream, an amplification towards an even deeper meaning: towards the immediate experience of the divine in that natural miracle we have called the shift towards healing.

Seeking the divine in the process of healing: this was the purpose of a visit to the sanctuary at Epidaurus. It was not a journey to the doctor, who merely administers treatment, but towards healing itself in its unanticipated and raw manifestation, as it was soon experienced in sublime [fig. 17] and also drastic dream visions [fig. 18]. Often the god intervened directly in the dream: 'Pamphaes of Epidaurus had a severe ulcer in his mouth', so reads the epigraph of a report on the healing process.55 'When he slept in a chamber in the innermost part of the sanctuary, he saw a face: he dreamed that the god opened his mouth, held it open with a wedge and cleaned it; after that he was healed.' The characteristic of this healing process is the quest for healing through sleep and dreaming. The sick person withdraws from others whilst sleeping, and also from their doctor, and surrenders themselves to the immediacy of the event. When the reliefs on the votive offerings depict the human companions during the healing process—family members filled with devotion and wonder, or medical staff during a routine operation—this is how the other aspect is described: the outwardly visible manifestation of the inner event, inseparable from the religious experience.

It was a ritual path along which the sick person would proceed, the details of which have not been handed down to us at Epidaurus. We do not know where the 'innermost chamber' of the sanctuary, the Abaton, was situated—the place to which the sick person would retire to 'sleep in the temple', the true incubatio. There, one encountered snakes at every turn. The temple staff, certainly, were by no means untrained or lacking in talent. Their behaviour, however, was rather passive, and their activity was limited to sorting and selecting. The dying were not admitted, as has already been mentioned, and the rest of the sick were wisely left to their 'own path to healing'. This was largely similar to the customary 'healing sleep in the temple' at an oracle site, since at times—and also in Epidaurus—one sought not healing but the god's counsel for some emergency, which was not necessarily related to one's state of health. Conversely, an oracular god, such as Amphiaraos in the Attic town of Oropos, might also appear, occasionally in the role of a god-physician [fig. 19]. The path to healing in Epidaurus differed, however, in one essential respect from the pilgrimage to an oracle, and in this sense it was more akin to the path of the initiates in the Eleusinian Mysteries: the expectation of a specific, profound experience upon reaching the destination.

Indeed, the kinship between Epidaurus and Eleusis did not rest solely on the general nature of the mysteries, which were common to both sanctuaries. When the hierophants, the holders of an Eleusinian priestly office, in later times also assumed a role in Epidaurus,56 this did not in itself signify much. But there must have been a more specific reason why the Epidauria, the 'Epidaurian celebrations', following the introduction of the cult of Asclepius in Athens, formed part of the festive cycles of the Eleusinian mysteries for the preparation of the initiates' experiences. However little we may know of the sacred events at Epidaurus and Eleusis, their forms of mythological expression are familiar to us and reveal significant parallels.

Asclepius is said to have appeared before his admirers in various guises – the Apollonian youth deserves no less attention [fig. 20] than the enthroned man likened to Zeus [fig. 21] –; his epiphany, as experienced during the cult, was the illumination of the divine child, who was greeted with loud acclamations. 'My cry be for him, the beautiful child and great light for humanity, Asclepius,' so goes the chorus with the ritual invocation in Aristophanes' play, when Pluto, the blind god of wealth, opened his eyes57 in the Asclepeion of Piraeus. This is also how the birth of the divine child was experienced, and thus announced, in the final hymn of the Eleusinian Mysteries.58 And just as Isilo of Epidaurus celebrates an enigmatic mother with this luminous birth and lists all her epithets, without alluding to her true name, so too is the sacred mother of the Eleusinian child considered unnameable.59 The initiate left the darkness of his hidden state, which heralded his initiation,60 or headed towards the throne of the unnameable goddess, where he was received by a friendly serpent [fig. 22]. The image of the underworld is far more prominent here than in Epidaurus, even though in Eleusis, too, it does not convey the sense of a realm of the dead from which there is no return, nor is rebirth possible. The events at Eleusis lead to a deeper level than those at Epidaurus. The path was the same, but the sick person who found healing at Epidaurus returned before the myste, the initiate, who in the Eleusinian ceremonies progressed as far as the queen of the underworld herself.

In Eleusis, the great goddess reigned supreme, revealing the mystery of immortality, being at once mother and daughter, a feminine being who eternally reborn herself.61 In Epidaurus, the masculine principle reigned supreme, which, illuminating its darkness, forges a path with vigorous fullness

. Infertile women would come to Epidaurus hoping that the god would father a child for them: ‘Nikesibule of Messene’, so went another healing tale,62 ‘slept to receive the blessing of fertility in the sanctuary and had a dream. She dreamed that the god had come to her with a serpent following him, and that she had lain with it, and after a year she had conceived two sons.” Aratos, the great warrior and statesman of Sicyon in the 3rd century BC, was regarded as the son of Asclepius after his mother had a similar experience.63 The serpent was the form in which the god manifested himself, and in the healing account of Andromache of Epirus, he appears in this role: ‘She was sleeping inside the sanctuary and had a dream: she dreamed that a handsome young man uncovered her and then the god touched her with his hand.’ Andromache would then conceive a son by her husband Arribas, king of Epirus.

This feature is also characteristic of the image at the sanctuary of Epidaurus, which still holds many secrets yet to be revealed. The connoisseur of human suffering, the serious and virile face of Asclepius—as we have already come to know him and as we shall come to know him even better—is by no means devoid of spirituality. Yet the Apollonian, spirit-destroying sharpness is softened by the radiance itself, with a darker warmth, thus revealing a kinship with Dionysus, who also appears in a relief alongside a non-classical type of Asclepius. The Asclepieion of Athens [fig. 23] was certainly situated, for more than one reason, in the immediate vicinity of the enclosure dedicated to Dionysus, on the southern slope of the Acropolis hill [fig. 24]. The Dionysian element, moreover, is not entirely absent from the sanctuary at Epidaurus. In the western half of the sacred precinct lie the foundations of an enigmatic circular structure, which in some way represents the symbol of the enigmatic whole of this sanctuary [fig. 25]. The foundations form a veritable labyrinth of concentric circles linked together by openings, such that to reach the centre from the outer circle, one had to first walk through each of the other circles. This type of construction only made sense when, on certain occasions, a ritual circuit had to be performed, and from the centre one could reach the upper part of the structure. This consisted of a circular wall flanked by two colonnades, with an entrance on the east side, topped by a richly decorated cornice. The outer wall of the building was painted in bright colours, whilst the interior base of the circular wall was of black marble. The interior space [fig. 26] was also adorned

with paintings. Two figures in particular caught Pausanias's attention: a divine child, whom the customs of the time identified as Eros, with his bow and arrows at rest and holding a lyre, and a woman drinking from a transparent glass vessel, whom Pausanias calls Methe, the
'drunkenness'.64 She was undoubtedly a Dionysian female figure who, like the boy, was connected with the cult for which this building was intended.

Pausanias describes the circular structure as a type of altar, a 'thymele' – a term which, in the context of the Dionysian theatre, is also used to refer to the most important place of worship. In academic literature, it is known as the Tholos, the 'circular building' of Epidaurus. Its excavator saw it as a building for the celebration of mysteries.65 Today we cannot be more precise when referring to it.66 What we do know, thanks to the discovery of the Asclepeion of Pergamon – the largest and most famous in Asia Minor – is that a semi-subterranean circular structure also formed part of the late cult of Asclepius [fig. 27]. The author of these lines descended into the labyrinth of the Tholos of Epidaurus and, amongst the fragmented pieces, found an imitation of a tree trunk with a mouse or rat sitting on top: an allusion to Apollo Smintheus, the god who sends the plague of mice and the pestilence. The epithet Smintheus, which Apollo bears in the Iliad and with which he sends the plague, derives from a Greek and likely pre-Greek word for 'mouse'. But Apollo is also the god who possesses for himself the two attributes of the bow and the lyre.67 The kind of additional Dionysian objects with which the birth of a divine child was also celebrated here corresponded to a birth in the sense that one aspect of Apollo emerged in place of another, and signified the shift towards healing: the transformation of a deadly force into a healing force. And this was what the sick sought at Epidaurus.

THE CHILDREN OF ASCLEPIUS ON COS

A trip to Cos was never part of the usual cultural itinerary when visiting Greece. This island – one of the twelve in the Dodecanese archipelago – aroused all the more interest among archaeologists, as with its gentle charm it seemed to be sunk in a deep slumber. Above all, they devoted their efforts to the famous Asclepieion of Cos, discovered in 1902 and excavated in the following years.68 It held no few surprises, and even today not all its secrets have been revealed nor have the lessons it offers us been fully explored. The site was not extraordinary in itself. According to chroniclers, the Greeks built their sanctuaries of Asclepius in particularly healthy locations rich in springs.69 This held true at least for those times and in those places, where hygienic considerations were taken into account alongside religious ones. In Rome, as we have already seen, this was not the case, whereas in Epidaurus and Athens the choice of location was admirable in every respect. Although, certainly, if the archaic cults of the local deities or those of other neighbouring gods also influenced the decision-making process, the hygienic aspect was equally important: both sanctuaries were sheltered from the wind and yet surrounded by fresh air. That this should be the case in Kos, one of the principal centres of medical science in antiquity, was to be expected. It was therefore no surprise that the vast foundations of the Asclepeion were discovered on the outskirts of the city of Cos, inland, where the island's terrain begins to become slightly hilly, on a hill with a healthy climate and not far from a mineral spring [fig. 28].

What was surprising, however, was the chronology of the buildings that made up the Asclepeion. One could have visited this sanctuary much earlier, following in the footsteps of a poet from Cos. The existence of the historical and artistic monuments housed within the Temple of Asclepius had been known since 1891, when Herondas' mimical poems (circa 250 BC) were rediscovered; his * * and *Mimiamben*, * * and * * were subsequently published. The fourth poem, * * titled * * 'The

Women Offering at the Temple of Asclepius', describes two simple women from Cos on their morning pilgrimage to the sanctuary. They give us the impression that they are allowing us to accompany them and witness their offerings. In this way, we were transported to the 3rd century BC, to a popular religious setting, transformed at the same time into a naive artistic admiration of a Greek place of worship. What we could not yet have suspected was the chronological outcome of the excavations: that this very Temple of Asclepius was entirely new in Herondas's time, and that the works of art at which the women marvelled dated from the period of its first flourishing. Herondas, a contemporary of the great Alexandrians such as Theocritus, and artistically very close to him, proclaims in his new poem the renown of Cos and its Asclepieion, after the ancient reputation and prestige of its school of physicians, bearing the name of Hippocrates, had been secured for times to come.

The relationship of dependence between Hippocrates and the Asclepeion was previously viewed in a different light. The claim that Hippocrates derived his science from the temple's accounts of healings has been handed down since antiquity.70 In this regard, the women of Herondas present such an account before our eyes on a votive tablet. Excavations have shown that this custom, compared with the practices that took place in Epidaurus, arrived very late in Cos and was only modestly developed; nor, for chronological reasons, can it be regarded as the origin of Cosian medicine. Above and below the small temple [fig. 29], the very one those two women had visited, a grand structure was built: above all, a much larger temple on the upper terrace, in the 2nd century BC. Today, with the help of the fragments found, it is possible to reconstruct that extensive sanatorium, which consisted of temples and halls [fig. 30]. Although this very extension has little to do with the ancient tradition of the religion of Asclepius on Cos. Rather, it bears witness to the resplendent significance of Epidaurus, whose influence the doctors of Cos could not resist from the end of the 4th century onwards. If one wishes to learn anything about the religion of Asclepius, whose propagators, before yielding to the influence of Epidaurus, were the physicians of Cos, then one must study more closely the situation that preceded the construction and expansion of the Asclepieion.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the Asclepeion, used as a place for healing sleep within the temple and built according to the design of Epidaurus, served as the most direct means imaginable for the healing process. The patient was given the opportunity to bring about the healing effect themselves, the underlying cause of which lay within them. For this reason, an environment similar to that of modern spas was created, with healthy air and waters, seeking to remove anything that might be harmful to the environment, and ensuring that the religious setting would help the deepest layers of the human interior to exert their full healing power. The physician, as a matter of principle, was excluded from the individual mystery of the patient's healing process; it was the patient himself who sought out the deities in a far more personalised manner than in the great mysteries of the archaic and classical periods. In Epidaurus, therefore, the physician supposedly and deliberately remained in the background of the process. To what extent the same was true in Cos, through its highly prestigious school of physicians, we cannot know. It is very likely that the strong scientific-medical influence, which later became evident in most of the Asclepieia, originated in Cos. The most probable historical sequence would be as follows: first, the attainment of a high standard of scientific medicine, developed by the school of physicians at Cos; then, from the sanctuary at Epidaurus, a shift towards a profound religiosity, the influence of which extended even to Cos itself; and finally, in the early imperial period, a return to the predominance of the medical orientation, including at Epidaurus itself. The period prior to Epidaurus's influence on Kos was not necessarily irreligious; the only difference was that a different form of religion was practised there. And it was not characterised as the religion of the sick, but rather as that of the physician and his predominant role.

At a time when medical science was flourishing on Cos, in place of the later sanctuary of Asclepius with its facilities for healing sleep, there was a state-run hospital where citizens received free medical treatment. It is astonishing to see how far back the existence of a state-run form of medical care can be traced. It is said that Charondas, the legendary lawgiver of the Greek city of Catania in Sicily—to which the inhabitants of Cos also owe many of their institutions—already found a state system of care for sick citizens there.71 The legislation, which

was associated with his name, emerged in a region where Greek medicine had already flourished within a deeply religious framework. This sphere offered the teachings of Pythagoreanism with its characteristic religion of Apollo, which encompassed the doctrine of the incarnation of its god, viewed as a pure spirit in human form, particularly in the personification of Pythagoras.72 Alongside these Apollonian sages stood out another contemporary, somewhat younger the physician Alkmaion.73 A form

A 'state-sanctioned' form of the medical profession, based on a religion rooted in spirituality and philanthropy, emerged quite naturally among the Pythagoreans of southern Italy. And without this analogous religious framework, it would scarcely have been conceivable in the ancient world.

In Cos, we must look for this background in the cult of the Asclepiads, whose requirements are known to us through the oath of the Greek physicians. The term 'Asclepiads' must be taken literally; according to their tradition, to which we referred at the outset, they are the successors of Asclepius, son of Apollo, whose knowledge and essence is passed on to his own sons. The genealogical history of the family – a line of leaders from the high aristocracy of Cos – dates back to ancient Thessaly,74 to the times prior to the colonisation of the island by the Greeks. Whether this line led through Argolis and Epidaurus, as information from Herodotus seems to indicate, or whether the founders and guardians of the sanctuary at Epidaurus represent a branch of the same line, is difficult to determine. In any case, on Cos, the distinctive gift of this lineage manifested itself differently than in Epidaurus. Rather than in a passive, devoted, or dreamy-mystical form, it was displayed in an active, reflective, scientific-empirical manner. Nevertheless, the attitude on Cos was no less religious than that of Epidaurus. It was so in that ancient sense, in which devotion is shown in the veneration of the origin of any form of being, as, in this case, towards the origin of the physician's way of life, which is in itself religious.

Through a novelistic description, in the form of a letter,76 we can hear the great Hippocrates speak of a celebration that apparently represented the special festival of the Asclepiads in Cos. The festival was called 'gathering the staff',77 and was linked to an annual pilgrimage to the sacred grove of cypress trees near Kos. It is not explained that the staff was a branch gathered from the grove, but this is highly likely. It is difficult

that a very straight staff can be made from a cypress branch, but the one depicted in a realistic statue of Asclepius on Rhodes [fig. 31] could very well have come from a cypress grove. In principle, it is no different from the sceptre of the King of Greece, which is nothing other than a staff passed down from generation to generation within a lineage – royal in Homeric times –78 of the ruling aristocracy. The snake coiled around Asclepius' staff [fig. 33] represents a second attribute in itself, whose symbolic value points to the origin of families or lineages, and coincides with that of the staff itself. Collecting and returning this staff to the sacred grove represented a symbolic return of the lineage to its origin, to Asclepius and Apollo. And this cultic act, simple yet significant, is imbued with rich and explanatory meaning when one considers Apollo's association with cypress trees.

To this god, in his capacity as Apollo Cyparissus, belonged a grove of cypress trees near the city of Cos. The grove could only have been the one in which, shortly after the death of Hippocrates, the first temple of Asclepius was built on Cos, and later the entire Asclepieion. The question is not which of his aspects Apollo displayed in a grove of cypress trees. The connection between the dark, with its evergreen foliage, standing tall with virile strength and reaching upwards—this tree, a witness to life, indestructible in the face of the world of tombs—has remained unchanged in the South from antiquity to the present day.79 And it is not irrelevant that Veiovis in Rome, possessing the characteristics of a dark Apollo and venerated in close association with Asclepius on the Tiber Island, had a statue there made of cypress wood.80 Originally, according to legend, the cypress was a handsome young man, a favourite of Apollo, named Cyparissus, who accidentally killed his most beloved stag, and, consumed by grief, was finally transformed into a tree. This legend is recounted to us only in the late Hellenistic style, and it states that it originates from the island of Keos, and not from that of Cos.81 The legend expresses the reference to Apollo – without naming the god directly – in two ways, through the cypress and the stag, which belongs less to Apollo than to his sister Artemis.82 Both the cypress and the stag appear in close mythological association with the Asclepiads of Cos, as if they were – to use the ethnological term – the totemic plant and animal, precisely those of the lineage that celebrated the festival in the grove of cypresses. The name of an apparent predecessor of Hippocrates was, according to legend, Nebros, 'the

‘young stag’.83 The oracle had decreed that, to combat the plague ravaging Delphi – so the legend goes – the aid of the ‘son of the stag’ as well as that of the ‘golden one’ should be sought. A solution was found when Nebros, a physician from Cos, and his son Chrysos were implored to go to Delphi. When Chrysos died in the battle against the Krisäer, he was buried in the hippodrome. His name, meaning ‘gold’, and the fact that he was buried at the site of the ritual chariot races—whose connection to the sun’s path is sufficiently explicit—84 presents this son of Nebros as a little sun in himself; that is, the stag as the darker animal father of the luminous son.

These mythological features of the legend of Nebros belong to a family tradition, which the Asclepiads brought with them from the North, from Thessaly. The name ‘Nebros, son of Nebros’ appears in the inscriptions of Kos,85 and attests to a deep connection with the mythological animal, which also explains the designation of ‘totemic animal’; although, in reference to the Greek context, where a totemic social structure is absent, it is more accurate to use the term ‘symbolic animal’. Alongside the ‘symbolic animal’ of the North, in the South appeared the ‘symbolic plant’ of the cypress, as an expression of the same awareness of the divinity of the medical lineage and that of its members. From the time of the great Hippocrates, who died around 370 BC, that is, from the moment of Epidaurus’s greatest splendour, the name Drakon, ‘the serpent’, also emerged within the family. This was the name given, according to tradition, the second son of Hippocrates, and later a son of his first son Thessalos, the ‘Thessalian’.86 It seems clear that in Kos the era of a new ‘symbolic animal’ of the Asclepiads began; with the staff, it linked that lineage to the aristocracy of divine origin, becoming the standard-bearer of physicians. At that time, the first temple of Asclepius was built in the grove of Apollo Cyparissus, and little by little it was expanded until it became a hospital which, in the manner of Epidaurus, facilitated access for the suffering to that divine and mysterious source of healing, which the physicians of Cos cherished as a family legacy through their cults.

By the mid-4th century – prior to the construction of the first temple – an altar dedicated to Asclepius had been erected in the cypress grove; compared with the ancient, petrified symbols of animals and plants from that era, it consisted of more

manifestations of that mystery. There, alongside Machaon, son of Asclepius, the deities Helios and Hemera, ‘the Sun’ and ‘the Day’,87 were also worshipped, as well as the moon goddess Hecate. Among Asclepius’s other companions were Epione, his wife, and Hygieia, his daughter; it is particularly the latter who would later be presented as his divine companion and represent his feminine counterpart [figs. 32 and 34]. Hemera, the goddess of the day, is mentioned only in connection with Asclepius, whereas Helios appears more frequently alongside him; indeed, in the inscriptions, the sun god precedes Asclepius.88 This alone demonstrates that he is not a secondary figure. Indeed, the wisdom of the ancient physicians, founders of the sanctuary, attributed the mysterious process of healing more to the night and sleep than to the day and wakefulness. The institution of healing sleep in the temple is proof of this. Further evidence is provided by the nocturnal, dwarf-like figure—a child wrapped in a hooded cloak—who often appears as Asclepius’s companion and who, by the decree of an oracle, is venerated in the Asclepeion of Pergamon.89 The small deity was known there by a name with a double meaning, Telesphorus, ‘the executor’, since an executor also represents death, although in other places he was also called Acesios, ‘healing’.90 The reader will encounter him again in the final chapter. That nocturnal backdrop, in a sense, was already there, in the grove of cypress trees of that darker Apollo, from whom Veiovis was formed in Rome. The Sun and the day have here, where they are depicted alongside Asclepius, an equally dark backdrop: a backdrop which, according to experience and logic, corresponds to all illumination. Right now, when we return to the women of Herondas,91 we shall realise their religious significance in the cult of Asclepius.

To travel from the city, which was about an hour’s walk away, to the temple in the grove of cypress trees, they had arranged their journey so that they would arrive before dawn and present the temple attendant with their offering of thanks for the healing of a sick person. The sacrificial animal was a rooster, a sacrifice characteristic of Asclepius [fig. 35], as its association with the rising of the sun gives it clear symbolic significance. The sacrifice is performed immediately. The women cry out:

It is already day… The temple door is open. The curtain is raised!

Until this moment, the temple doors had been closed. The women, standing before the altar, had already greeted the god at his statue outside with a ‘Lord Peón’, the invocation of Apollo the Healer, but his appearance, his epiphany, would not take place until the sacrifice of the rooster, the opening of the temple and the rising of the sun. To the east stood the door of the small, older temple visited by the women of Herondas, and to the east stood the great altar, which also remained at the central point of worship within the enlarged complex. The temple of Asclepius had the same orientation as the sanctuary at Epidaurus, whilst the great pavilion for the sick faced slightly more towards the south-east, towards the ‘mountain of the dog’s ascent’, the Kynortion. In the Asclepeion of Athens, the song of Asclepius’s awakening could be read in later times on a marble tablet.92 ‘Awake, Paeonian Asclepius, lord of the peoples,’ it begins, and ends in a similar vein: ‘Awake and hear your hymn!’. This god’s connection with the rising of the Sun, his ‘appearance’ as a kind of solar epiphany, could not have been expressed more clearly. The meaning of Socrates’s final, strange words93 has always been a source of great wonder. ‘O Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; take it to him; do not forget!’ This is what the philosopher said as he lay dying, and now we know what he meant. He might just as well have said: ‘The Sun rises, light comes, let us give thanks!’

The rising sun was the great symbol of the mysterious nature of the divine, which the Asclepiads of Kos venerated in their family cult. That clarity and purity of conviction which characterise the writings attributed to Hippocrates and disseminated by the school of physicians at Kos,94 are not at odds with this historical and religious discovery. When the author of the text referring to the ‘sacred disease’ acknowledges, more or less, that all diseases are both human and divine,95 this does not mean ‘natural and supernatural’, but ‘natural and, precisely for that reason, divine’. This is also how the knowledge of these physicians must be understood, and how divine their art is. It represents the knowledge of something natural that lies at the root of that requirement and consequence and which, in the subsequent formulation of the treatise96 ‘On the Ethics of the Medical Profession’, can be read as follows: ‘That is why philosophical knowledge must be introduced into medicine and medicine into the science of philosophy. For a physician possessing philosophical knowledge is like a god’. The power to help without the inner clarity of knowledge, and certainly also the philosopher’s knowledge on its own, without the power to help,

would not make him the divine healer.97 The divine healer who, however, unites within himself light and aid is Asclepius, the ancestor, the original model of mortal physicians: this is how, from now on, we must understand his figure.

There were images of Asclepius predating the head from Melos, as well as most of the representations from Epidaurus, some of which had been created as early as the 5th century, during the golden age of classical art in Athens. And, indeed, not only those of bearded male faces, but also those of beardless ones. The reader will find in the illustrations section a selection of the types in which the image of the god emerged from the great Greek artists98 [ill. 36–44]. Following these is the image of Hippocrates himself [ill. 45], who was identified thanks to a find made on the Isola Sacra, near Ostia.99

The information regarding the gold crowns awarded to physicians at the height of their careers is also significant. This is recorded in the legend of the great Hippocrates, whom the Athenians allowed to participate, along with his son Thessalos, as guests of honour at the Eleusinian Mysteries.100 And later they presented him with a crown worth a thousand gold coins.101 A crown was also intended for the enormous head of Asclepius, inside the grotto of Melos, and we shall also hear of a crowned statue of Asclepius's son, Machaon. A golden crown is always a radiant crown, and a radiant crown is a sign of solar kinship. A tribute of this kind – or even just the legend of such a tribute – emphasises, in a vividly mythological way, precisely what distinguished the lived religion of Asclepius: the excellence of the Asclepiads that defines the true physician. For medical talent must be something special, which the followers of Asclepius believed they had inherited from the solar father of their lineage: neither religious nor philosophical nor scientific knowledge, but rather an immediate, and not merely acquired, familiarity with being ill and with healing. A dazzling knowledge of the possibilities of emerging from the depths, which, with the aid of observation, practice and training, can evolve into an excellent art and science: the true art of healing. This brilliance and its sun-like radiance were the religion cherished by the physicians of Kos. We shall devote the following considerations to the mythological expressions of the brilliant nature of the art of healing.

HEROIC DOCTORS AND THE DOCTOR OF THE GODS IN HOMER

Our journey in search of the traces of the Asclepiean religion took us from Rome to Epidaurus, before continuing eastwards to the island of Kos; and, so as not to miss out, we shall also make a detour to Asia Minor to see the Asclepieion at Pergamon. Nor, of course, must we forget the region and city that form the centre of the Greek world: Attica and Athens, nor the poetry and poetic legends of Homer, alongside the heroic epics associated with his name, to which the Asclepiads of Cos felt so intimately connected through their family traditions, as well as to the cult of their primordial god. Homeric poetry and the cult legends of an Asclepieion originating – to name the most archaic forms of the place of worship on Cos – from a sacred grove of Apollo Cyparissus: these two categories of narrative, so distinct, are not free from an essential discord. Both contradict each other in the fact that, for both Homer and the epic poets who write in his style, Asclepius was not a god, but a mortal hero: a hero who dies, and only then receives the veneration of a fallen royal hero, but who in the meantime is regarded merely as an 'excellent physician'.102 What the religious veneration of such a heroic physician actually signifies, we shall learn in Attica, through Homer himself and his statement on the contradiction.103 In the year 420 BC, Asclepius made his solemn entry into Athens,104 where he was granted his sanctuary, situated on the southern slope of the Acropolis, sheltered from the wind and close to the springs, which are still today regarded as 'healing springs'. There he resided from then on with his family, with the goddesses Hygieia and Epione [fig. 46], already mentioned, and his sons [fig. 47]. He was sometimes depicted leading a whole retinue of gods. In Attica, however, other physicians were also venerated, who were considered to be something more than mere human doctors. A monument to the 'foreign physician'105 stood not far from the double gate of Dipylon in the time of Lucian, the satirist (2nd century AD); it reminds us of the physicians of Cos, travelling on foot who recorded their experiences in the manuscript The Visits (Ἐπιδημίαι), and also reminds us of the legendary

miracle-workers who regarded themselves as incarnations or messengers of Apollo, such as Pythagoras and Abaris the Scythian. The deeply rooted figure of the mythical physician was not a ‘stranger’ in Attica, but a ‘hero’,106 like the Homeric heroes. In Athens itself, he was called the ‘Heros latros’, ‘the medical hero’, in an inscription with the appendix, ‘he who is in the city’ (ὁ ἐν ἄστει). This particular designation, depending on the place of worship, has its equivalents in Attica and is likewise that of an institution, and may be found both in the city itself and in the countryside, on the outskirts of Athens. We can gain an idea of this institution from two large inscriptions containing an inventory of the goods kept107 inside the sanctuary of the ‘Heros latros’.

One of the inscriptions from the late 2nd century BC mentions a basket for sacrifices, a wine jug, two chalices, an incense burner and a font, as well as several votive metal statuettes, mainly limbs, which were to be melted down under the supervision of the public administration, having been declared unusable. The metal obtained was used to produce new vessels and objects of worship. In the other inscription, dating from 221–222, the votive objects are listed alongside the names of those who had been cured, and of those who had been saved in wars or shipwrecks – a small inscription next to a reproduction of an object from the ship indicated such rescues – and the new ritual vessel was also mentioned: a large silver wine jug. Wine offerings were not always part of the sacrifices dedicated to heroes. According to these inscriptions, however, wine played an important role in the sacrificial ceremonies of the ‘medical hero’, whom the second inscription also refers to as a ‘god’. One must therefore ask: what might have been the relationship between a Heros latros and Dionysus and his sphere?

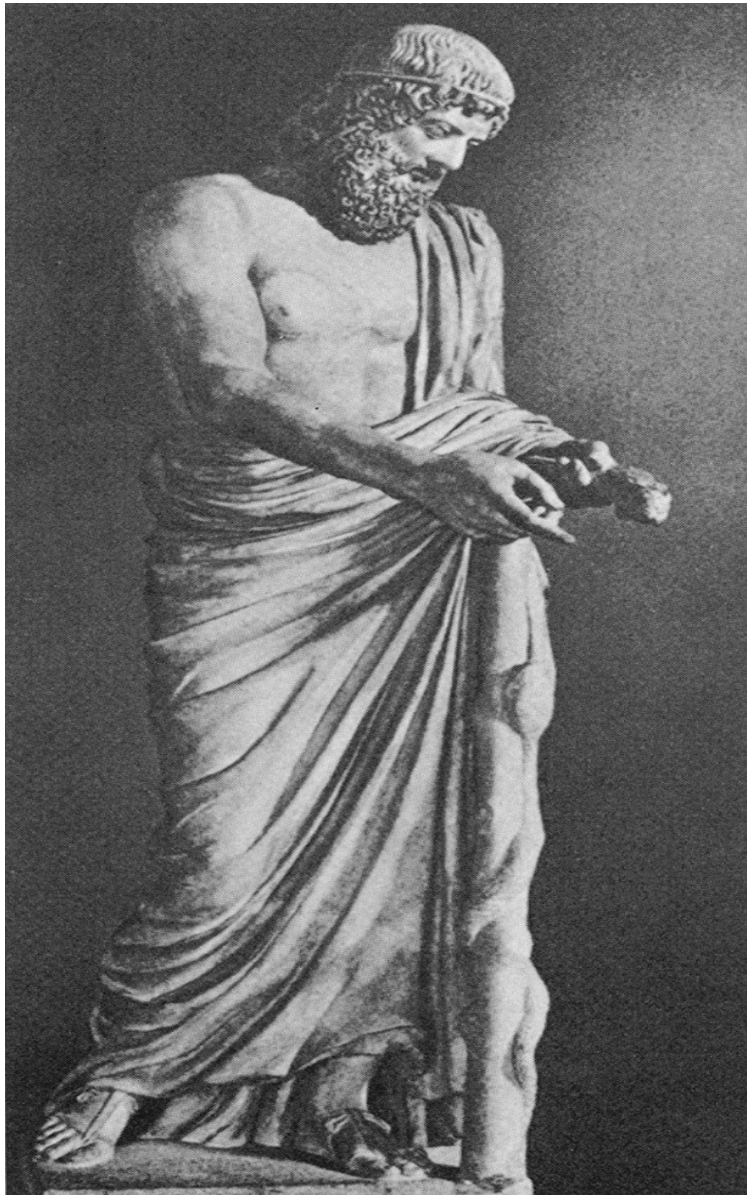
31. Statue of Asclepius of Rhodes

32. Fragment of a relief from the Asclepeion of Athens

33. Statuette of Hygieia from Rhodes

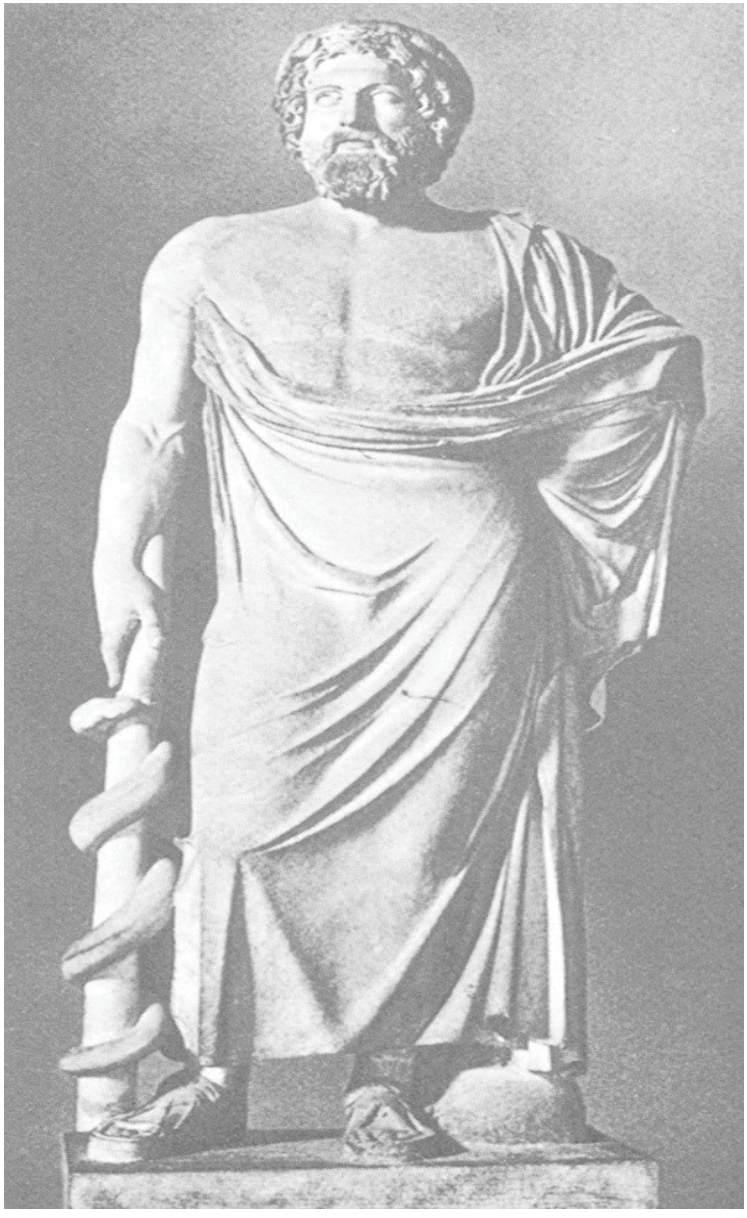
34. Late Roman ivory carving depicting Hygieia

35. Statue of Asclepius with a child figure at his side, holding a rooster and a sacrificial knife

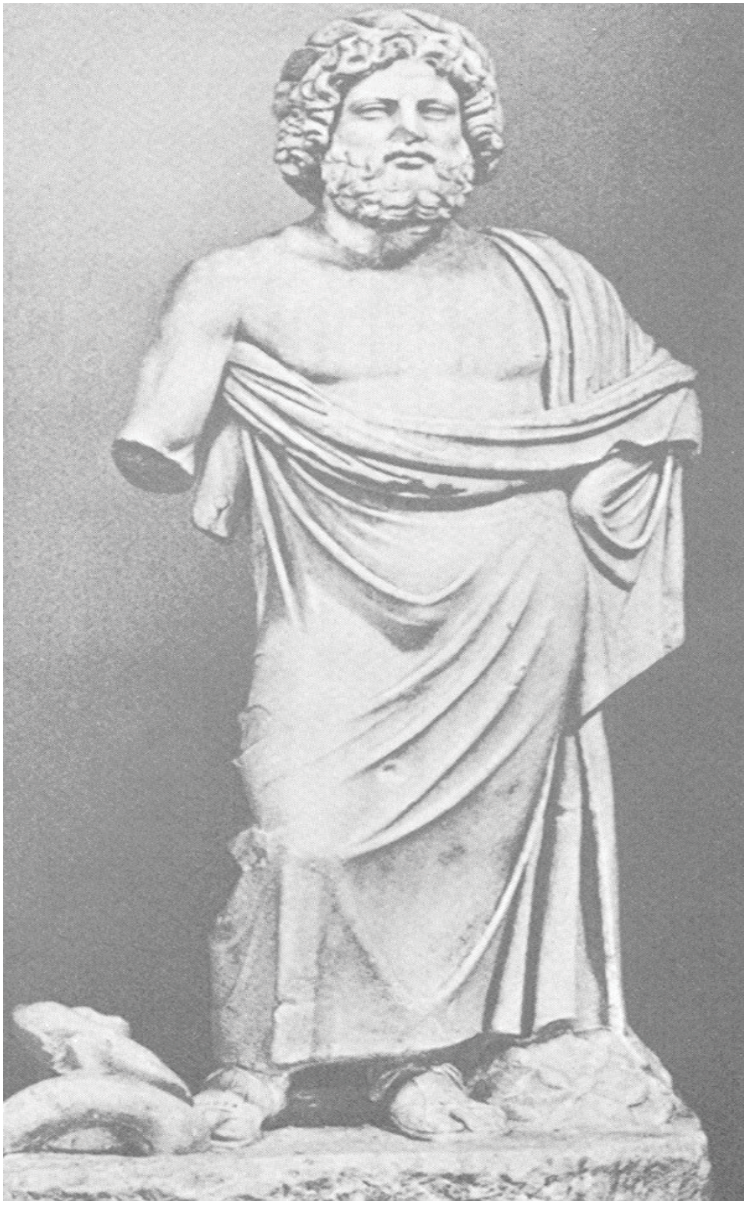


36. Asclepius in the Uffizi Gallery

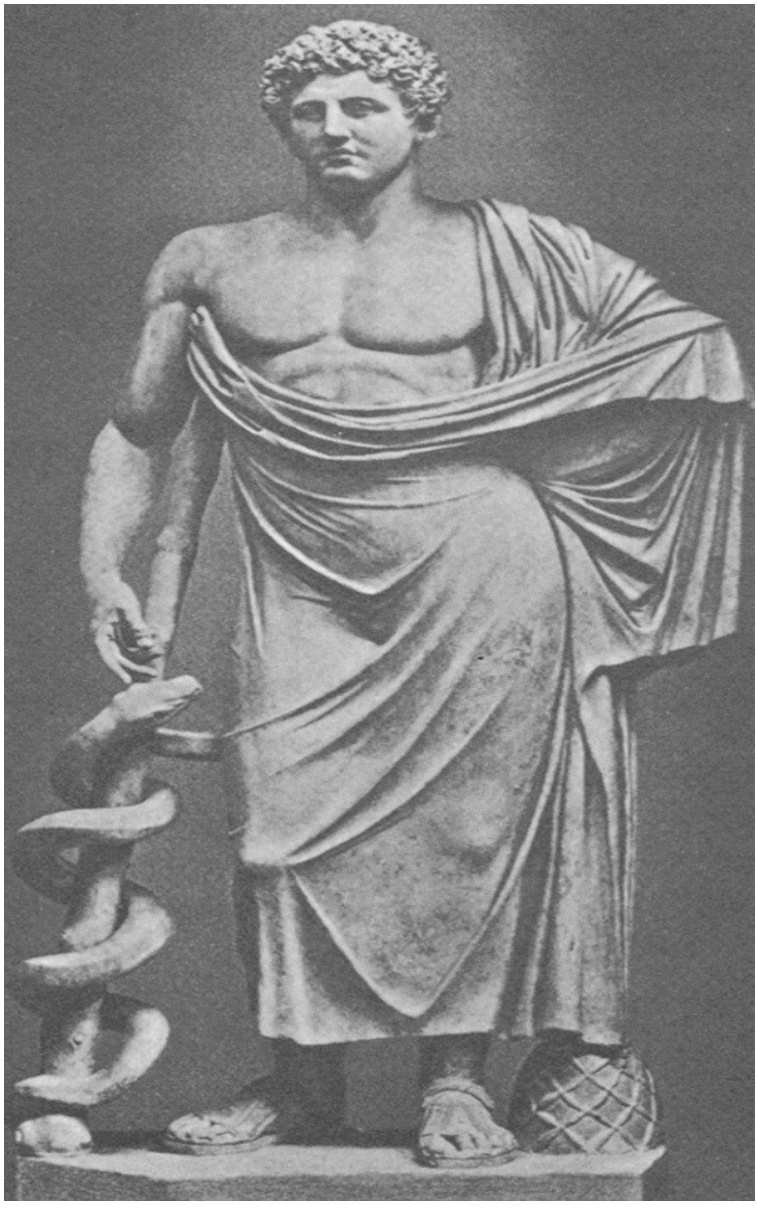
37 and 38. Photographs of details of the Type I statue of Asclepius



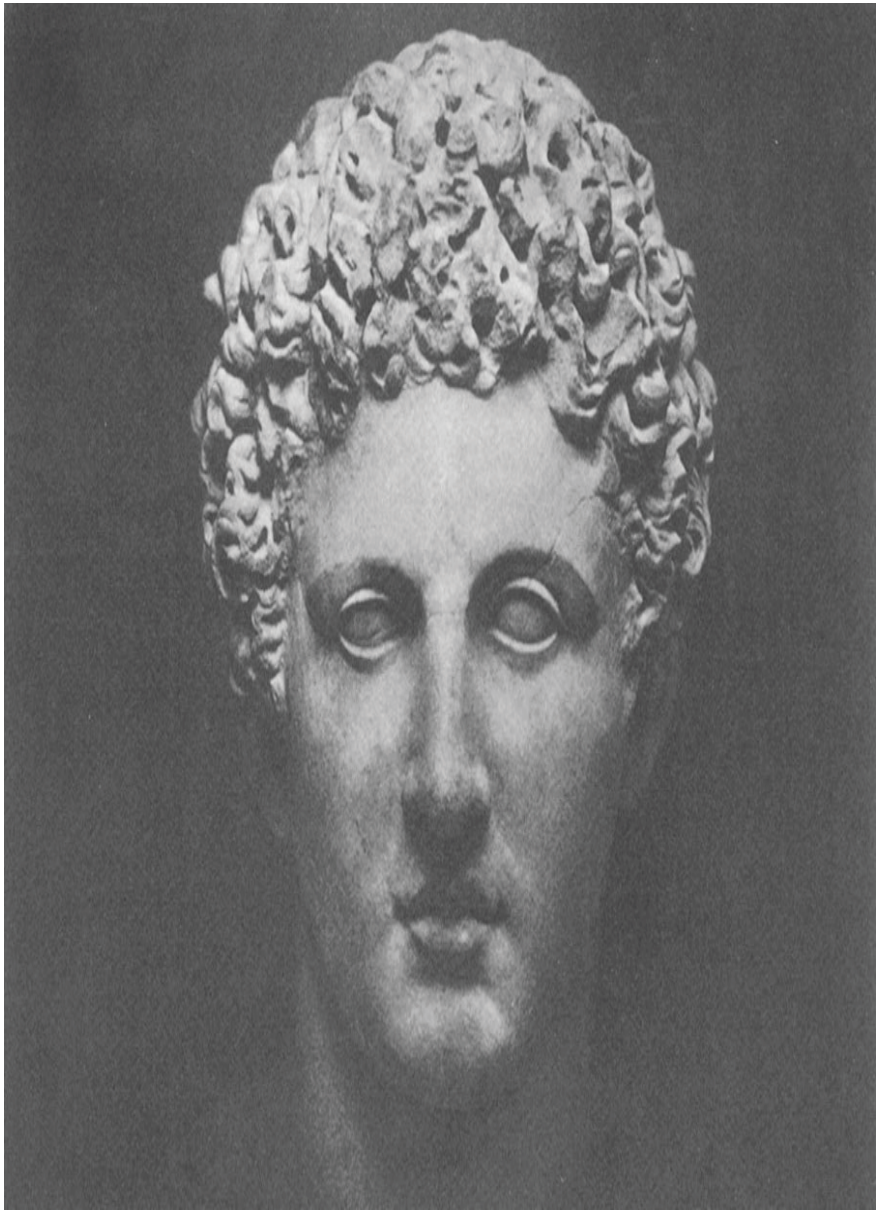
39. Asclepius in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence



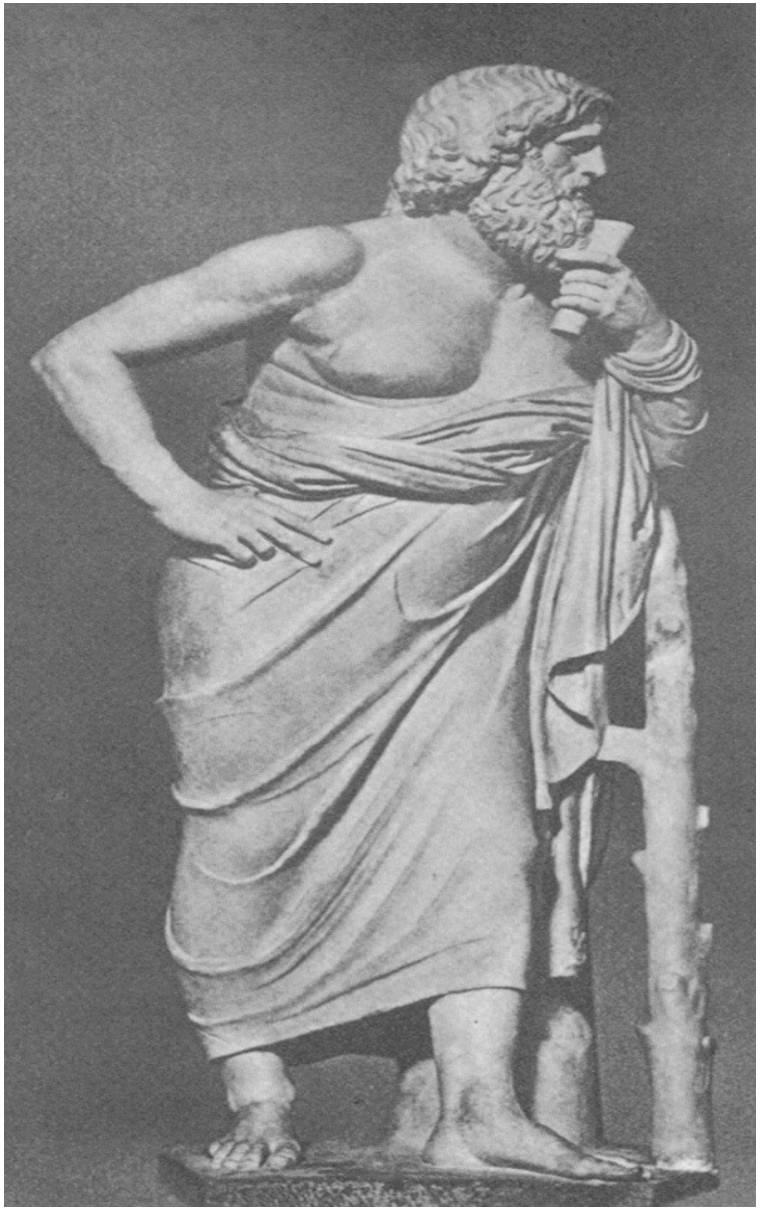
40. Asclepius in the Syracuse Museum



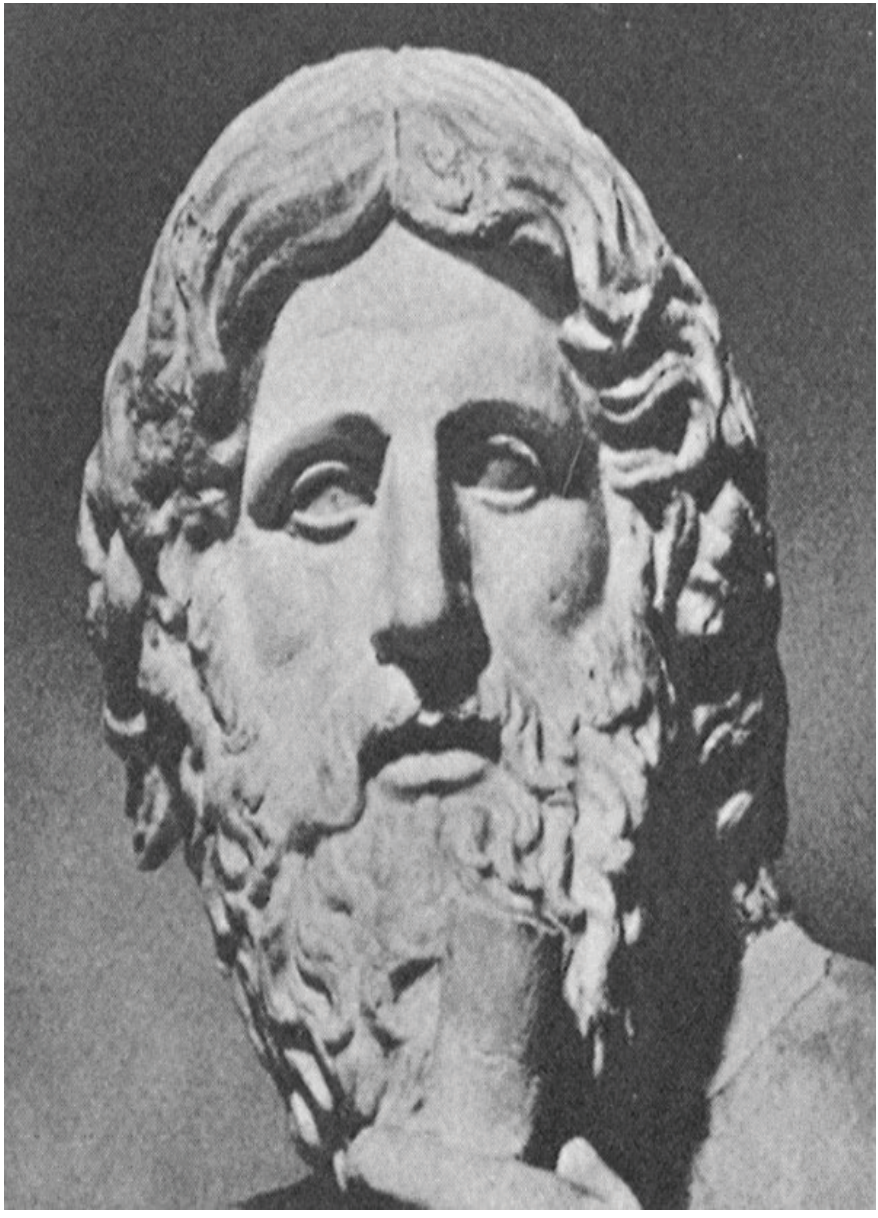
41. Asclepius in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican



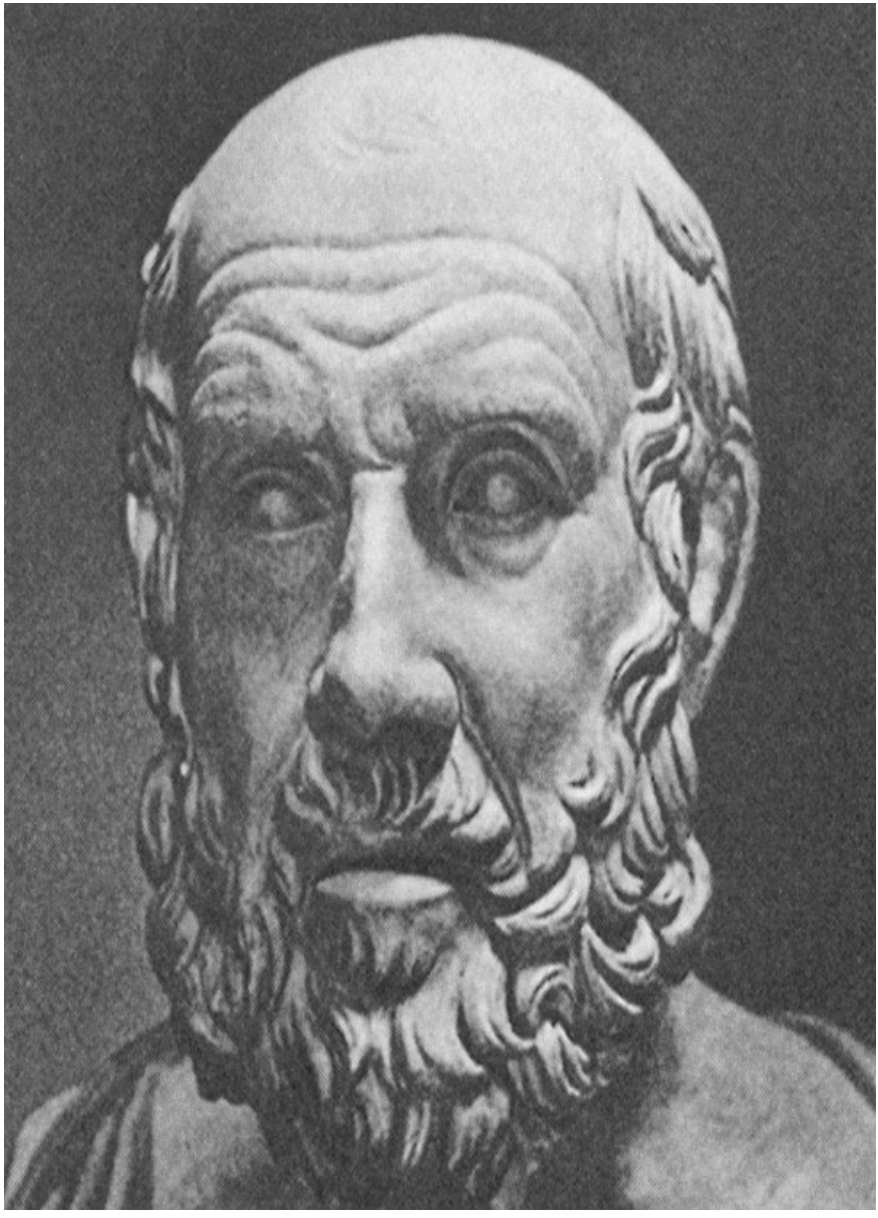
42. Head of the statue of Asclepius, Type IIa, fig. 41



43. Asclepius in the Palazzo Pitti



44. Close-up photographs of the Type III statue of Asclepius, fig. 43



45. Hippocrates in the Uffizi Gallery

46. Fragment of a cult relief of Asclepius accompanied by two goddesses, c. 390 BC

47. Cult relief from the city of Thyreatis (Peloponnese): an image of the family of Asclepius

48. Image of a vase by the vase-painter Sosias

A depiction of Dionysus is recalled in the circular building at Epidaurus. This connection between the two spheres, the Dionysian and the Asclepiean, in Athens corresponds to the proximity between the Asclepieion and the Theatre of Dionysus, and on the outskirts of the city, at Marathon, to the adjacent location of the tomb of Heros latros and the sanctuary of Dionysus.108 In other words, there was a chthonic sanctuary bordering on one dedicated to Dionysus. We also know the name of the figure venerated in this funerary cult. He was called ‘Heros latros in the city’. Before mentioning him, we shall explain how these designations should be interpreted.

In other Attic towns, besides the city of Athens and the village of Marathon, there were also healing heroes: for example, in Eleusis and Ramnus. For the Eleusinian Heros latros, the personal name Oresinios has been handed down,109 the late personal name of a physician who once lived – as is expressly indicated – and it must be assumed that his funerary cult is due to a way of life that became a cult of the divine physician. In this case, it was bestowed upon the memory of his effective activity as a healer, who had always been venerated in the figure of the Heros latros, and thus acquired a new characteristic feature. Originally, it was not the dead from all walks of life, nor those from the medical profession, who were ‘heroes’, but the heroes of ancient times, those who had previously been portrayed in the Homeric epics and later in Attic tragedy. Even among the physicians, there were above all warriors and army commanders. The name Heros latros is, consequently, a heroic name in Athens and Marathon, linking its bearer to the ancient warrior heroes. One of them was called Aristomachus, ‘the outstanding fighter’, a name more significant than personal, and even less eminent. Aristomachus was not a frequently praised hero, as was, for example, Amphiaraos, the seer and healing god, venerated in nearby Oropos. Compared to him, Aristomachus paled in comparison: he was called Ramnus, and also Amphiaraos, or was confused with Amphilochus, a son of Amphiaraos.110

With all these epic-heroic names, we seem, apparently, to be very far removed from the Dionysian sphere, but not so from the family tradition of the

lineage of the physicians of Cos. We now leave Attica: the excavation sites of Athens with their scent of chamomile, the countryside with the aromatic air of Aleppo pine, stretching from Oropos to Eleusis. Our guide on this journey, Pausanias, whom we have followed before, tells us of the hymns sung at the sanctuary of Asclepius in Pergamon,111 and these in turn mention a hero in the mould of the protagonists of epics and tragedies, who is particularly linked to the secrets of the art of healing. We must also get to know him – a subject for specific mythological observations – at least in a cursory manner, in order to introduce ourselves to the mutual relationships between these two multifaceted and seemingly so diverse worlds: the world of heroes and the world of the Asclepiads.

There is a tale of that Telephus who was wounded by Achilles, and who later received a prophecy from the Oracle of Apollo: he who wounded him must also heal him.112 He was the defender of the region of Asia Minor, the place where the splendid city of Pergamon was later built, and where he was wounded in the fight against the Greeks who were approaching, mistakenly seeking the city of Troy there. His name marked the beginning of the solemn chants at the Asclepieion of Pergamon. Not only because he was considered the country's most famous hero, but surely also because his story, known in its many variations,113 was significant to the successors of Asclepius. Telephus, named for the inexplicable healing of the wounded by the wounding, was associated with Apollo, the deer and the cypress. His stepfather was called Korythos,114 which was also a nickname for Apollo, and just like Apollo Korythos, he was a healing god115 in Messenia. A doe had nursed the infant Telephus, whose name meant 'he who illuminates the distance', whilst his mother, Auge, was called 'the light'. A son of Telephus was that favourite of Apollo, Cyparissus, who, having killed a beloved stag, had been transformed into a cypress tree. All these features of the mythological variations on the solar birth, the epiphany of daily and annual light, which precede a form of death of the light at the time of the winter solstice, were symbols of change in the healing process, and of the healing brought about by solar genius. For this reason, they belonged to a hymn of the liturgy of Asclepius.

Pausanias also reveals something negative to us, but this negative fact merely proves that the hymn, which began with Telephus, was equally distasteful to the

Asclepiads; thus a son of Telephus could not even be named in the temple, let alone in the praise of a song. This son bore a name that spoke of the realm of the dead: he was called Eurypylus, ‘he of the broad gate’. In the ‘Little Iliad’116 it is said that he beat to death one of the two sons—heroic physicians, known in the Iliad—of Asclepius, namely Machaon. This was the first physician to heal wounds, whilst his brother Podalirius also cured invisible ailments, those of the soul.117 The post-Homeric poet Arctinus recounts this particular feature, and names Poseidon as the brothers’ father – a strange departure in the epic from the traditions of the Asclepiads, who knew precisely that they were in agreement with Homer on this point, and in Podalirius and Machaon venerated two great ancestors, the first sons of Asclepius. Nor should we be surprised by this divergence or by Homer’s reserved attitude, an attitude we shall discuss shortly. For Homeric poetry precisely and meticulously eliminates these mythological elements, those we have noted in our observations.118

If we now turn our attention to the figure of Maeconas, the first surgeon, our observations are no longer directed, as they used to be predominantly, towards the mythology of the Greek medical gods, towards the living and the stimulating, towards the illumination and clarity that contrasts with a dark backdrop, but also towards the backdrops themselves: towards the mortal and the murderous. Macaon, a Heros latros, in the original sense of these words, bears a name as warlike as Aristomachus: something like ‘the butcher’, a term sharing the same root as the Greek word for battle, μάχη.119 Other healing gods or healing heroes who are regarded as sons of Macaon, though by their names they might rather appear as gods of war, such as Polemocrates120 or Nicomachus:121 ‘he who rules over war’ or ‘he who is victorious in battle’. As warriors and physicians in one person, they express a unity. To wound and to be wounded, that darkness which is a prerequisite for healing, and which makes the medical profession possible and renders it a necessity of human existence. For this existence allows, amongst many other possibilities, for these too to take place: the existence of one who wounds and that of another who is wounded, which is likewise that of a being who heals, whilst an animal merely wounds and is vulnerable. Nevertheless, only man’s wounds are curable, but not man himself. The ruler of the underworld ‘with the wide gate’, Eurypylus, finally welcomes Machaon, he who wounds and heals, yet is incurable

in essence. The warrior and healer dies from a wound. Yet in his funerary cult he remains alive, attaining the form of existence of the Greek gods, characterised by the ability to inflict and receive wounds, and to heal and be healed.

This category of medical heroes was to be found both within and outside the city of Athens, as well as in other Greek regions; and those who had not distinguished themselves through a medical culture of original genius—such as that of Cos, for example—became uneducated and uncouth quacks. Their original significance is revealed in a richer tapestry of mythology and heroic legends. It should come as no surprise, however, that in the ancient accounts referring to the family tradition of the Asclepiads, to their mythological knowledge and to the foundation of their particular way of being—the medical way of being—relatively little mention is made of that which is darker and deeper. Such knowledge of the deepest depths requires silence as something natural and immediate, even if it is true that the greatest secrets of being human have always been open secrets. Perhaps with these observations we are referring, in any case, to a kind of medical secret, the secret of self-diagnosis, which for the ancient physicians of Greece had taken the form of the gods and heroes and their destinies. The Greek physician also had the aid of his poets, an aid directed towards self-knowledge: following the creators of mythological motifs, and also Homer, who knew the human being so deeply and thoroughly. The epic par excellence of inflicting and suffering wounds – designated by the word
'war' – that is the Iliad. And when it comes to the sufferings and misfortunes of the heroes, it does not remain silent.

The large number of doctors who populate the Iliad has always astonished scholars of Homer. They must, of course, bring the wounded to them, just as Idomeneus' companions do in Book XIII (210–14); but the majority are already there, and their presence represents a most natural occurrence in the epic. Some scholars wished to see in this a later transformation of the original, more primitive situation and sought to remove the mention of these anonymous doctors from the text of the epic.122 As if this did not represent precisely a natural and necessary stage in the development of surgery! Two different experts in wounds, side by side: the warrior and the battlefield doctor, is precisely what is most natural in archaic situations. The two sons of

Asclepius, Podalirius and Machaon appear on the battlefield of Troy with their own small armies, embodying both the warrior and the qualities of a skilled physician.

As the creative deity of the art of healing, however, behind the sons of Asclepius, the Iliad presents the half-animal, half-human figure of a very archaic deity, the centaur Chiron.123 Asclepius himself is mentioned only in the list of heroes124 as the father of the two sons, and in Book IV, where Machaon is mentioned alongside Menelaus,125 it seems as though the poet knew nothing at all of a medical god, or at most of a mortal physician named Asclepius who had become a demigod. Nor does he mention any father related to him, but only a fatherly friend and teacher who taught Asclepius the use of herbs: Chiron. Thus, in Homer, Asclepius is not even distinguished from the other demigod heroes. One of Chiron's pupils was Achilles himself, who had even passed on to his friend Patroclus the knowledge he had learnt from him – such as the use of the Chironian126 healing herb. Nevertheless, such allusions to the wise and just centaur serve more as a cover-up for what the poet knows of the god of physicians. It is only through later accounts that we learn that Chiron too was wounded, the immortal bearer of an incurable wound. Something similar happened to Asclepius: Homer's selective art omits him for reasons we are yet to discover.

In Book V of the Iliad, we are told of the wounds of the gods. In this book, and in Book XI, the climactic moments of the drama caused by serious wounds are highlighted. When the Greeks find themselves at the height of their power, the fact that Diomedes even wounds the intervening deities also contributes to the achievement of this feat: thus Book V could be called the book of the wounded gods. Aphrodite is the first to receive a painful wound to her hand. And whilst it is true that the pain of this divine suffering is somewhat dissolved in the smile of her father Zeus,127 the mother of the wounded goddess, Dione, covers over even deeper mythological wounds with her words of comfort. We must read at least part of her revelations in order to understand this sombre aspect of the world of the Greek deities.128

‘Suffer, my dear daughter,’ thus begins Dione’s enumeration of the sufferings that impetuous men had caused the gods, and first she mentions the chaining of Ares by the giant children of Aloeus, but the god sustained her:

… Hera suffered

when Amphitryon’s violent son struck

her in the right breast

with a three-pronged arrow;

then, too, almost unbearable pain took

hold of her.

The classical translator of Homer, J. H. Voss, even in this passage softens the original text, since it speaks simply of Hera’s ‘incurable pains’129 inflicted by Heracles’ arrow: the word ‘almost’ does not appear in the original text. The incurable pains of the queen of the gods stem from a wound which, in Hera’s cyclical nature,130 just as they recur, are healed. The wounds of the gods are intended, in this context alone, to remind us of the high significance of the wound, not in the limited reality of an individual – specifically the one affected – but in Greek cosmology.

In addition to Hera, Dione also mentions a wounded god: Hades, the god of the underworld or, as Homer calls him, Aides:

… Hades suffered

among them, the mighty

one, a swift arrow,

when the same man, the son

of Zeus the shield-bearer,

at Pylos, amongst the dead, struck him

and delivered him to the mercy of pain.

But he went from Zeus to the palace,

and to lofty Olympus, his heart

deeply troubled,

pierced through with pain; yet, in

his sturdy shoulder

the spear was embedded,

and his soul was cast down. Yet

Paeon, standing over the wound,

applied remedies

that kill the pain,

he healed him, for it was certainly not

fatal, by no means,

given his constitution, far from it.

The wound was once again inflicted by an arrow from Heracles. Homer describes the realm of the king of the underworld as a place called Pylos, the ‘gateway to the dead’. Hades receives his wound down there, ‘by the gate’, and ascends to Olympus where he finds the physician. The same physician who, in Book V of the Iliad, also heals the other wounded god. This

second wounded figure is also the one who inflicts the most wounds: the god of war, Ares. Diomedes, aided by Pallas Athena, wounded him ‘with a gleaming bronze spear’. Screaming like ten thousand warriors, he fled to Olympus and was healed by Paeon in the same way and for the same reason as Hades: as a god, he could not die.131

Who is this divine healer of Olympus who guarantees the immortality of the gods by healing their wounds? Does he merely embody the medical profession, personify it and elevate it to the heavens? Certainly not the role of earthly physicians! In Homer, this role is traced back to the centaur Chiron, who, linked to the non-Olympian world of life and death, remains on earth. Homer draws an insurmountable dividing line between the realm of immortality and the sphere of mortality. Even the finest physician, including Asclepius or the even more divine Chiron, with all his being and way of working, remains trapped, according to him, within the realm of mortality. Paeon stands above physicians. As a source of healing, he is superior to Chiron or Asclepius. In the Odyssey, the Egyptians with healing knowledge, the inhabitants of an almost mythological land, are descended from him. In another version of the Odyssey text, Apollo is named alongside Paeon, as if he were the true source of the art of healing.132 However, this version did not prevail. Homer and the epic tradition remained steadfast in their portrayal of the archer Apollo and all his perilous attributes. In this account, Paeon represents only the healing power alongside Apollo: a physician of the gods, whose light outshone that of Asclepius.

There was a particular theology of Homer – also known by other names – which drew a strict distinction between the Olympian and the non-Olympian, between that which is eternally luminous and that which is deadly and dark. Nevertheless, the pious custom and religious belief found in all places of worship dedicated to Apollo led to the ritual song being sung under the name ‘Peón Peán’, in honour of Apollo. And in this way, a deep connection between Peón and Apollo is revealed. The Greeks themselves sing the paean to Apollo in the Iliad, to celebrate the reconciliation and the end of the plague it had brought with it. The paean is not meant to repel or drive away the plague; rather, its essential nature is entirely positive: it welcomes something healing. At Delphi, the paean was sung from spring until late autumn, and only in the winter months did it fall silent.133 In a typical verse of the song, however, a repetitive refrain

, the desire is expressed:134 ‘The Paean must never leave us – it must never end or be absent.’ But who, then, is this Paean?

It was not the song called the Paean that must never end nor must it ever be absent! But precisely that positive element which, as a divinity that eternally heals the wounds of the immortals, Homer had established on Olympus, thereby assigning to Paean that place where termination does not exist. Above all, no termination of that which distinguishes the essence of the god Paean. Olympus was the place of eternal light. It was not merely a heavenly place, in a sense merely a luminous abstraction, but it was sunny and warm, for the gods love the sun even more than we humans do. That sun, Helios, which is also here for us mortals and yet sets. In winter it loses its strength, and sometimes our father Helios is obscured. Let us listen to the paean that Pindar wrote for his countrymen at the moment of a solar eclipse! It is an invocation, not to reject the darkness, but to cling to the ray of sunlight:
‘O ray of sunshine,’ thus begins the song,135 ‘what have you set out to do…?’ For precisely this—that which we wish to retain here—exists eternally on Olympus. We might call it the pure, healing power of the sun. Apollo also represented this force for the Greeks136 – though he was not the only one. He also carried with him the wounding, deadly power of the bow. Outside the realm of Homer’s theology, there was nothing more natural than to invoke the benevolent Asclepius as a Paean, and to sing the Paean to him. Homer is not seduced by fleeting earthly cures. He knows full well that a
‘healer’ such as Paeon is there only for the wounds of the gods, whilst for our own, at best, we shall have a vulnerable heroic physician.

Book XI of the Iliad, moreover, describes a climactic scene, marked by wounds. There, it is not the gods who are wounded, but men, and among them the physician Machaon. And here the great despair begins. Almost all the great Greek heroes have already been wounded: Agamemnon, Diomedes, Odysseus and, from that moment on, Machaon himself has just been struck by a three-pronged arrow in his right shoulder. The elderly Nestor is charged with carrying him swiftly from the battlefield to the camp tent, ‘for a physician who cuts and extracts the arrow’, these are the famous words of Idomeneus,137 ‘and applies a balm whilst bandaging it to bring him relief, is worthy of being held in high esteem’. When Achilles sees Nestor passing by with the wounded doctor, he knows that he has

The time has come: the Greeks feel deeply humiliated by Zeus. A doctor himself needs a doctor. We hear this telling phrase from another hero, whose wound brings the series of significant wounds to a close;138 his name is Eurypylus, and his wound is healed by Patroclus.

We have already learnt who imparted his medical knowledge to Patroclus,139 and we are familiar with a scene depicting Achilles' wounded friend being tended to by this great hero of the Greeks. A prominent 5th-century BC vase-painter [fig. 48] adorned a fountain with this scene. The name of Achilles appears next to the hero tending the wound, and the name of Patroclus next to the wounded man. The wounded man himself helps to dress his wound, caused by an arrow that has already been removed and can be seen beside him. He carries an archer's quiver on his back. In the Iliad, Patroclus does not fight with a bow and arrows, but with a spear. According to the Iliad, not even Eurypylus, who bandaged Patroclus, is an archer. To create this illustration, and based on what we gather from Homer, the painter could at most have drawn inspiration from this wounded man who wounds, a hero in need of care who, with skilful hands, assists Achilles. Consequently, there was no shortage of reasons to think so,140 the Sosia vase-painter was not inspired by the Iliad, but by the Cyprian epic, which recounts the events from the preliminaries to the wrath of Achilles. To these events belongs the landing of the Greeks at the wrong spot in Asia Minor, where Telephus gave them battle. Wounded by Achilles, Apollo tells him he must seek healing from Achilles himself. Later he was healed by the very man who had wounded him – even through the very spear that had wounded him, according to the best-known version. Patroclus had fought heroically141 in the battle, and it must have been then, when he was wounded, that we see Achilles bandaging him on Sosias's vase: a wound inflicted by the exemplary Telephus, whose son—whose name is related to Eurypylus of the Iliad, and who quite rightly bears this underworld name—was later to kill the surgeon Machaon. The monument commemorating Patroclus's wound inflicted by Telephus would be the design on the beautiful vase.

According to the poetic and heroic legends concerning Eurypylus, son of Telephus, it was Machaon who, among the sons of Asclepius, in a sense continued the close connection with his father's dark aspect linked to death—an aspect that encompassed all the possibilities of the physician's destiny on earth. He forms the earthly counterpart of the celestial Paeon. The physician

of the gods on Olympus: he who heals only, a god who is free from all that is deadly. The greatest physician on earth: a hero who wounds, heals and is mortally struck. Machaon possessed a hero's tomb with a cult in the city of Gerenia,[142] in Messenia. Nestor, who cares for him in the Iliad and who rules in Pylos – in a sense at the gateway to the underworld – was named Gerenius after that city. Scholars who sense in this Homeric elder an ancient, pre-Homeric god of the underworld are correct. In his original essence, he may well be indistinguishable from that Eurypylus through whom Machaon met his death.

And yet, despite everything, this sanctuary of Gerenia was no place of death; within it stood a crowned statue of Macaon,143 perhaps the original model for the curious headdresses adorning some of the statues of Asclepius [figs. 49–51]. A 'Heros latros', which is what Macaon became after his death, died yet did not perish. The sanctuary bore a special name, the same as the great island of the sun: it was called Rhodes. A name alluding to the sunflower, to the rose, and with them also to that solar illumination found in the cult and myth of Asclepius, as well as in his sacred sites. Seen from this funerary sanctuary, the location of Aristomachus's tomb at Marathon, next to a temple of Dionysus, no longer seems so strange to us. Striking features characteristic of the legend of Telephus – and of Eurypylus – point towards Dionysian realms. The Dionysian offering of a vine stock with golden leaves and silver grapes drew Eurypylus to Troy, so that once there he might slay Macaon.144 And so Telephus could only be wounded by Achilles when Dionysus caused a vine stock to spring up in the midst of the battlefield, in which he allowed Telephus to become entangled.145 The darkness that envelops these divinely wounded, the wounders and the surgeons, is rarely mingled with the Dionysian, which once again, in its own way, does not call for death, but for the warmth and sunshine that wine and the vine themselves contain, even within that darkness.

THE ORIGINS IN THESSALY

In the *Iliad*, Asclepius' sons, Machaon and Podalirius, lead men from the region of northern Greece, Thessaly, the place where the Hellenic tribes first encountered the pre-Greek world of the Mediterranean.146 Of the three cities of Thessaly mentioned by Homer,147 Tricca ranks first. In Herondas' poem, the women invoke Asclepius by the name of the Olympian physician of the gods, Paeon, and at the same time as the ruler of Tricca.148 Cos ranks only second, for them, among the god's favourite places. Isilo of Epidaurus also mentions the Thessalian city of Tricca in the verses preceding his paean to Apollo and Asclepius; and he states that there, moreover, offerings are made, above all to Apollo Maleatas, and only afterwards does one descend to the innermost part of the Asclepieion of Tricca.149 The Asclepieion of Tricca, according to the geographer Strabo, was the oldest and, by virtue of the god's presence, the most exalted of all those existing in Greece. Strabo draws on his mythological sources, and according to these, Asclepius is said to have been born by the river Lethaios.150 If Epidaurus, so to speak, was the Rome of the religion of Asclepius, from which it spread throughout the ancient world, so may Tricca be its Bethlehem, and Thessaly its Palestine, whilst Cos forms a sort of patriarchate alongside them, whose origin can be traced directly back to Tricca. It is not difficult for us to understand that the splendour of Epidaurus, with its beautiful forms adorning the sanctuary, extends its influence over Cos and also over the original sanctuary in Thessaly. Excavations have not been carried out along the River Lethe to the same extent or with similar success as those conducted at Epidaurus or on Kos.151 The Christian-Byzantine city, later Turkish, and now once again a Greek city, Trikala, stands on the site of the sanctuary, and its ruins were used as building material. The fact that four churches, including the city's 'mother church', stand on a relatively small area between the Acropolis and the Gurna spring, which rises beside the river, bears witness to the archaic sanctity of this ground.

The remains of the wall, which were discovered in the eastern part of the city, in the
'mother church', beneath a late Roman mosaic, albeit of proven

Greek construction, tell us nothing. More significant are the small finds previously made in this part of the city, as well as the location of the medieval castle, which on the southern slope of the mountain replaces the ancient Acropolis. Characteristic votive statuettes were found: Telesphorus, the little god of the night, dressed in a cloak and hood [figs. 52–53], a rooster, heralding the new day, and an infant. In this case, one is tempted to suppose that, as a gesture of gratitude, he was blessed for the healing of the newborn, especially when one recalls that in Greece, even today, very young children are still taken to the 'healing sleep' of a miraculous virgin. Their little yellowish faces, after seeing them sleeping on the platform, by the night-time light of the candles and in front of the icon, are not easily forgotten. In an Asclepeion, however, at least in Tricca's, the newborn, as a blessed offering, may have maintained a direct relationship with the god himself.

The mythological sources recounting the birth of Asclepius are more revealing here than the archaeological finds, and these clearly indicate the perspective from which the site of the sanctuary—and indeed the entire region of Thessaly—should be viewed. The river, which marks the boundary of the god's birthplace, forms a semicircle, stretching from the west to the south and part of the east, and bears the name of the underworld river of forgetfulness and refuge – the Lethe, or Leteo: a clear indication of the site's mythological significance. Lethe, literally translated, means refuge and isolation. The Lethaios – the 'river belonging to the Leteo' – separates the site of Asclepius' birth as if it were something of the 'afterlife', and sets it apart from the rest of Thessaly, whose vast plain stretches out before the Acropolis of Tricca like a world of its own, surrounded by majestic mountains. To the east, however, towards which the newborn god gazed, lay not only the realm of the rising sun, in which he could surely recognise the image of his own birth, but also the place where he had been conceived, and that of his highly significant mythological history.

For the inhabitants of Tricca, the Sun rose over a mountainous landscape that surrounded Thessaly's smallest plain and Lake Boibeis, or Beobes, as if it were a world unto itself, and enclosed it to the west. On the part of the lake not visible from Tricca, which is dominated to the west and north by and the majestic Pelion, took place the innombrables

the events leading up to the birth of Asclepius, and perhaps even his birth itself, as can be inferred from the original accounts and the few literary narratives that are presented with a certain restraint and religious reverence. We know the Epidaurian version from Isilus's paean, in which he unequivocally implies that the true name of Asclepius's mother must not be spoken. The two literary works recounting the Thessalian birth story—the Hesiodic version, of which only fragments have survived, and the third Pythian ode by Pindar—translate the language of the most ancient mythology into that of a modern heroic epic. There are, however, other accounts that connect with this Thessalian site and reveal something more primordial, predating Homer, Hesiod and the heroic epic.

Lake Boibeis, translating the name literally, represents both the lake of Boibe and the lake of Boibe. For the city of Boibe, on the side facing the lake, is named after the dialectal form of that goddess whom the rest of Greece calls Phoebe.152 The goddess reigned over the marshy waters of that corner, beside the slopes sloping north and west of Pelion. However, if one asks the mythologist who the goddess Phoebe was for the Greeks, for the time being he can offer only two clues. In the Hesiodic genealogy, which was decisive for classical Greek religion, the Titan Ceus, as founder of the Apollonian line, occupied the first place on the list; his grandson was Apollo, bearing the epithet Phoebus. On the female side, the Titaness Phoebe, wife of Ceus, was listed first. For she is the ancestress whose name recurs in the family of the Asclepiads of Cos, also as a woman's name. A Claudia Phoebe is attested in the time of Emperor Claudius.153 This appearance – so late – can scarcely be understood unless one considers the use of male names such as Nebros or Drakon: named after a mythological ancestor, just as the human Phoebe should be reborn as a mythological ancestor. The second indication can be found in the Roman poets, who call154 the Moon Phoebe, in Greek.

Of this original ancestress of the moon goddess, we shall explain only what is strictly necessary. She is referred to above all in that primordial love story, which is said to have taken place by Lake Beobes:155 the union of a primordial goddess, the first woman in the world, with a god representing virility, whom mythographers also call Hermes, due to his pronounced

phallic form – in a sense the primordial herma, the original phallic idol –.156 The goddess also bore various names or epithets, but only those of deities who in antiquity held the same rank as the Moon or were associated with her, such as Persephone, the goddess of the underworld, or Artemis, the Roman Diana. The goddess of Lake Beobes is also called Brimo, like the great goddess of the Thessalian city of Pherai; the form in which she appears in northern Greece is that of Persephone, goddess of the mysteries, who possesses so many names because her true name was not to be uttered; she is the 'unmentionable one'. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which the birth of a divine child was celebrated, the priest announced the event with the following words: 'The queen has given birth to a divine child, Brimo the Brimos'. And our informant adds that this means 'the strong one and the strong one'.157 Brimo and Brimos are not actually common Greek words, but belong to the language of the Thessalian region, in which Boibe represents the common Greek form for Phoebe, or Febe.

The name of the original lover by Lake Beobes also appears in classical Greek and Latin sources. In Latin it is rendered as valens, the
'strong', in Greek, ichys, a word that differs158 only in intonation from the common Greek expression for 'strength'. This god, representing primordial virility, 'Hermes' or 'the strong one', fathered with the primordial woman, the lunar goddess Phoebe or Brimo, 'the strong one', that child who in Eleusis is invoked as 'Brimos', 'the strong one'. In Thessaly, this child is said to have been the son of Coronis, the revered Asclepius of Tricca. Such are the authentic mythological tales, not those invented for literature. The authentic ones vary in names and figures whilst retaining the same theme: in this case, the theme of the birth of a divine child who comes – first in darkness and then in light – from the union between the moon goddess and a strong god who works in the darkness.

The different names given to the goddess refer, in part, to the different phases of the Moon. These phases appear in mythology side by side, as sister figures. Most often there are three of them, and their names signify first the waxing moon rising from the darkness, then the moon between two 'half-moons', and finally the phase in which the Moon once again takes the shape of a crescent and disappears.159 Thus it can be understood that in Messenia, the place as far as which the myth of the birth

Asclepius of Thessaly's mother was called Arsinoe, and of his two sisters, one is named Ilaira, the Merciful, a nickname for the gentle full moon,[160] and the other Phoebe. In the first syllables of the name Arsi-noe, there is a hint of rising from darkness, and through this the moment of the act in which Asclepius is conceived is also indicated: a dark time of the new moon. And this also explains why Asclepius's mother, as Isilo demonstrates, could have been named Egle, 'the light', and yet, in her role as Apollo's lover, bear the name 'maiden of the crow', known as the dark beauty of Coronis.

It should be noted that these names have not undergone any shift in interpretation due to forced etymology, but rather their underlying meaning is already clear. In the epic love poem between the heroine Coronis and Apollo, attributed to Hesiod, it is even recounted that the crow was originally white, and only turned black as a result of this love story. This animal fable, which is not known only in Greece,161 is a mythological form of expression used to describe the darkening of the moon. The reasoning that the white crow was transformed by Apollo, for having brought the message of Coronis's infidelity, was subsequently integrated into the original mythological content of the tale, to which the animal figure of the lover belongs—the bird that, in a different role, remains constant alongside the figure of the maiden. The moon goddess is as luminous as she is dark, and just as dark was she in her union with her nocturnal lover, the father of Asclepius. The poetic versions of the myth provide further details about her. In the heroic legend, in which epic poets transform the mythological material, it is difficult, however, for the hero himself to appear as readily in his animal form as in his human form, as readily in sombre forms as in bright ones. The goddess as heroine, to belong equally to the dark, must be unfaithful to her luminous lover, who in turn begets his resplendent son.

Hesiod's version describes Coronis as the king's daughter and a sublime maiden, who was bathing her feet in the waters of Lake Beobes when Apollo saw her and desired to love her.162 Her mother is never named, as if she had even been motherless in the poetics of the Homeric heroic legends, like the original maiden of mythology: the first woman.163 The male figures who, apart from Apollo, still belong to her in the heroic legend are sinister. Her father, King Phlegias,164 is a son of the

god of war Ares (though also of the golden goddess Chrysa), an arsonist and sacrilegious towards gods and men, who sets fire to the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Ixion, another great sacrilegious figure, brother of Coronis,165 is considered the first murderer and a violent lover of Hera, queen of the gods. He too was associated with fire, for he kills a guest by burning him in a pit, and for boasting of Hera's love for him, he is bound to a wheel of fire as punishment. Phlegias and Ixion are figures opposed to the Apollonian, embodiments of evil fire, fire as a destructive force.

According to Hesiod's account, Phlegyas offered his daughter in marriage to Isquis, a son of Elatus; she was with child by Apollo and was expecting a divine son. Elatus himself bore a name no less evocative than that of his son, 'the Strong', for 'Elatus' means 'fir'. To the north of Pelion, on the western slope of Mount Ossa, lay Elatia, 'the fir city', to which Elatus and his son must have belonged. There stood the entrance to the valley of the temple, which played an important role in the myth and cult of Apollo. It was there that Apollo would journey every eight years, transformed into the figure of a boy from Delphi, to rediscover himself in some way, and thus be able to become once more, through a ritual formula, the 'true Phoebus'.166 We learnt of Apollo's intimate relationship, in his dark aspect, with a tree—the cypress—through his sacred grove of cypresses on Cos. Cypresses and firs are found on Pelion,167 the place where the symbolic value of the northern tree must have been transferred to the southern one. Isquis, as the son of the fir, stands in a sacred landscape dedicated to Phoebus and Phoebe, as the lover of this goddess so close to the dark Apollo. Translated into the language of heroic legends, the son of King Elatus was meanwhile to appear as a rival to the god, and the heroine Coronis as an unfaithful bride, who is slain at the wedding feast by the arrows of Artemis, Apollo's sister. And so she too would have a connection with the malevolent and devastating fire: she is thrown onto the pyre, and from its flames Apollo lifts the infant Asclepius, the son born of his mother's death. For his upbringing, he entrusts him to the centaur Chiron, the wise healer, who dwelt in a cave on the summit of Pelion.

So much for Hesiod's account. Pindar168 emphasises the secret tryst in the darkness between Coronis and the Strong One, which only served to further arouse the god's wrath. In his work, Isis is a seductive guest who

comes from Arcadia, and the daughter of Phlegias, always eager for the new and unknown, cannot resist him. However, the fact that Pindar has Apollo's rival come from Arcadia already reveals something more about the original figure of Isquis. In Arcadia, mythological creatures are once again encountered, whose precise corresponding figures are known from their original homeland, Thessaly, and Isquis's father, Elatus, also belongs to them. He is one of the centaurs who dwells in both Thessaly and Arcadia, and in the high mountain regions of the Peloponnese.169 Chiron, the kindest of the centaurs, has his cave on the summit of Pelion, and also lives in Malea, in the foothills of the Peloponnesian mountain range. Elatus and Chiron are bound by a special bond. Heracles' arrow, aimed at Elatus, strikes and mortally wounds Chiron in his cave at Malea. According to another tradition, something similar happened to him on the heights of Pelion.170 Malea and Pelion are two distinct places where the same mythological events occur. The vigorous seducer, lover of Coronis, comes from a realm originally inhabited by centaurs; whether this was located in Thessaly or further south is of no consequence. In this realm reigns the figure of the centaur Chiron [fig. 54].

The sovereign of Lake Beobes represents a dark sphere in the story of Asclepius' birth, that nocturnal world of knowledge concerning births and deaths, in which seeds and forces converge in a more spiritual birth. The bearers of such seeds and forces appear in the primordial world of mythology as contradictory animal figures, whether whole or half-man and half-animal, who are forever bound to Asclepius [fig. 55]. The Strong One, who in his original relationship with the lunar female was merely the masculine principle, also manifests as an even darker double of Apollo, and as the son of Elatus belongs to the race of the centaurs. Elatus, the Fir, is at once a tree essence and a centaur.171 Chiron, as the wounded divine healer, dies in his stead. However, the fact that a Greek god has an incurable wound could actually be regarded as the most contradictory creation of Greek mythology. There is still something more: he unites the animal with the Apollonian, and despite being known for his equine form, with his characteristic as a creature of nature, both procreative and destructive—as centaurs are normally known—he is a wise tutor to heroes in the arts of healing and music.172 Associated with Cape Malea, apart from him, there are only the dark, procreative deities such as Poseidon, who appears in equine form

, and also Silenus, in his animal form. Maleates, ‘of Malea’: this is Apollo himself, as ‘father’, to whom a sacrifice was to be offered before that to Asclepius, both in Tricca and in Epidaurus.

What a strange closeness and kinship between Chiron and Apollo! This once again highlights that obscure sphere—not devoid of spirituality—from which, according to Greek mythology, the art of healing springs. Apollo is as close to the Roman Veiovis as he is to Chiron, and the name Veiovis translates into Greek as ‘Zeus of the underworld’.173 This designates precisely the same sphere in which Chiron reigns174 alongside Pelion. At the summit, Zeus Akralos, the Zeus of mountain peaks and the sky, was worshipped, but not only him. The foundations found of the sanctuary were divided into two parts. To the south, facing the sunny side, looking in a sense towards the diurnal part of the world, stood the temple of Zeus. In the northern half there is a cave, which can only be the famous Chironion, the cave of Chiron. This division attests not only to Chiron’s nocturnal nature, but also to his high rank in the order of the deities of Thessaly. It is no coincidence that in classical mythology he represented the son of Cronus, the representative of the gods and of the tree goddess Philyra, the Linden, who is a brother of Zeus, with whom he shares the world.

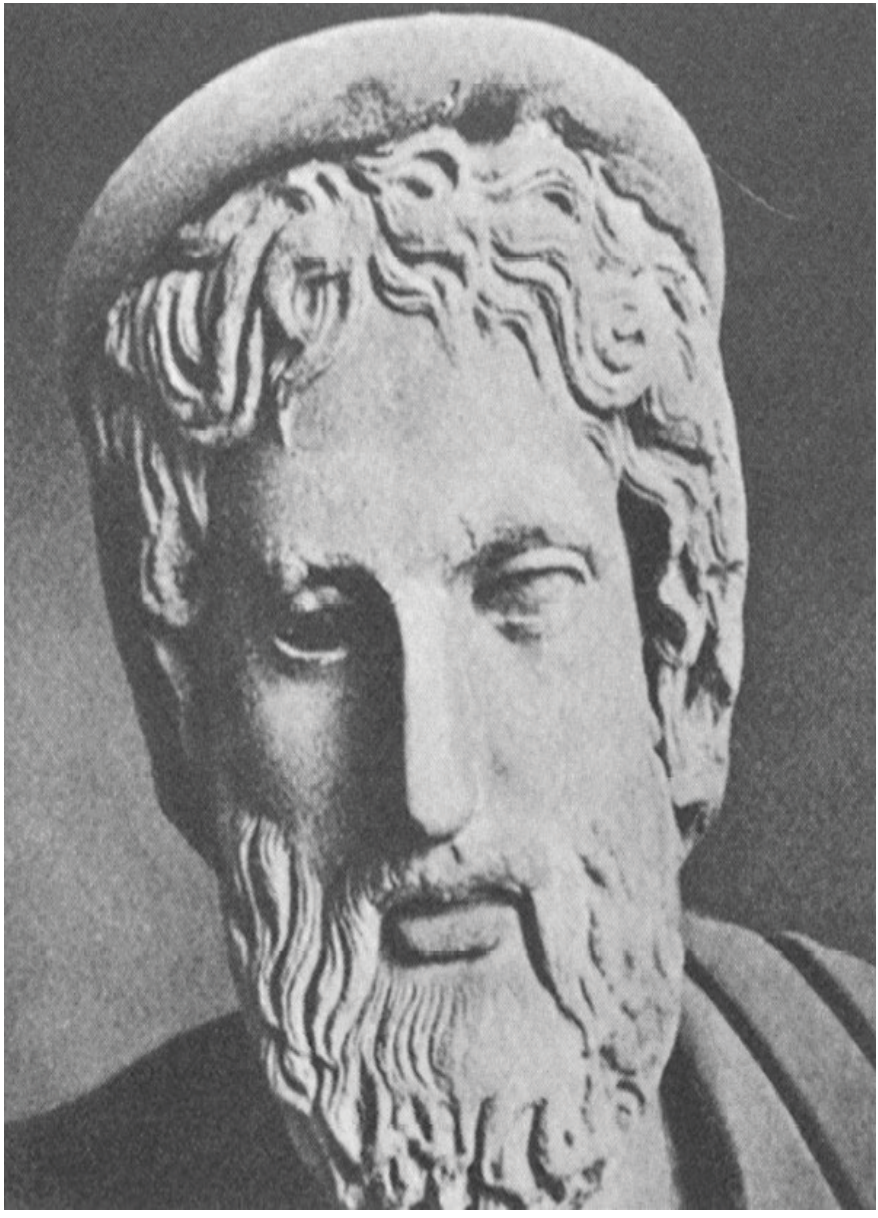
On Chiron’s side of the world lay Lake Beobes, at the foot of Mount Pelion, and beneath his cave was the valley of Peletronium, famous for its abundance of healing herbs.175 It was in this valley that Asclepius, when entrusted to Chiron, became acquainted with the plants and their miraculous powers – and with the serpent.176 Here too grew the centauric or Chironian plant, which apparently cured everything, even the bites of all snakes, including the wound from the poisoned arrow from which Chiron himself suffered.177 This contradicts the tragic belief178 that Chiron’s wounds were incurable. Chiron’s world, with its inexhaustible possibilities of healing, must at the same time remain a world of eternal agony. His grotto, an underground chthonic place of worship, even without this suffering, was also the entrance to the underworld. The image formed by all these elements – in religious and poetic terms – is unique. The figure of the god, only half-man and half-terioform, suffers perpetually from his wound, carrying it into the underworld, as if the primal knowledge of this original mythological healer, predecessor and forerunner of the luminous divine physician,

, embodied for posterity all the knowledge of a wound, in which the healer eternally shares the suffering.

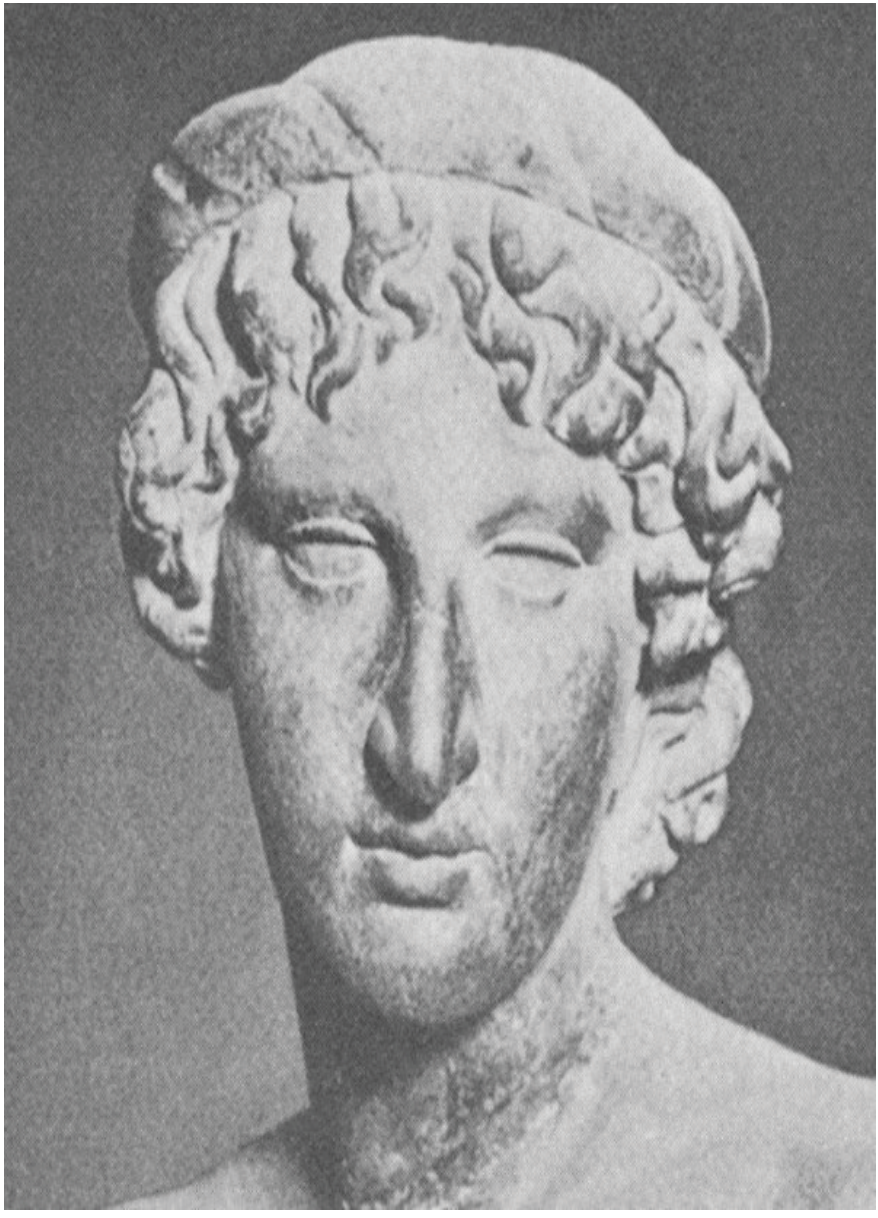
The physicians of the city of Demetrias, to which the sanctuary on the summit of Pelion belongs, venerated Chiron as the founder of their lineage, just as the physicians of Cos venerate Asclepius as the founder of theirs. In another city in Thessaly, however, human sacrifices were apparently offered to Chiron and to the hero Peleus, also a dweller of Mount Pelion, in the same manner as those offered to the dangerous gods of the underworld: a report which, in this respect, does not merit much credibility.180 Nevertheless, Asclepius is also linked to the underworld. There is talk of the death penalty inflicted upon him for raising the dead, and of how in doing so he had transgressed the iron laws of the Moira: Zeus hurled him with his thunderbolt into the underworld.181 And in Tricca his flash was celebrated as the birth of a divine child on the banks of the Lethaios. There was also knowledge of an even more secret birth that had taken place in the Chironian grotto: it is thought this may have been the first birth of a centaur.182 The child's father was Ixion, the brother of Coronis. It is always the same mythological sphere to which Asclepius also belongs. And wherever his birth was celebrated in Thessaly183 – the birth of an Apollonian healing god – Asclepius was moved just as much by his enlightenment [fig. 56] as by the realm of the underworld, as towards Chiron.

Pindar regarded Chiron as a dead god, and he was so in a double sense: as a chthonic deity and as a Heros latros, he who died and did not die, and also in the sense that Greek religion excluded such contradictory figures from the most archaic and primordial mythology, valuing them only as figures from a previous heroic age. Nevertheless, the strange contradiction which, for the inhabitants and practitioners of the art of healing in ancient Thessaly—and surely also for later Greek physicians—found its expression in the god Chiron, perhaps constituted a contradiction in itself within the art of healing. Chiron, the dark god, was capable of restoring even sight,184 although Apollo is naturally regarded as the founder of ophthalmology.185 To be familiar with the darkness of agony and to find the seeds of light and healing, just as occurs in the enchantment of the solar cycle at the birth of Asclepius, is as contradictory as Chiron, and yet it belongs just as much

to the genius of medicine, as the healing light sources of Peón illuminate.



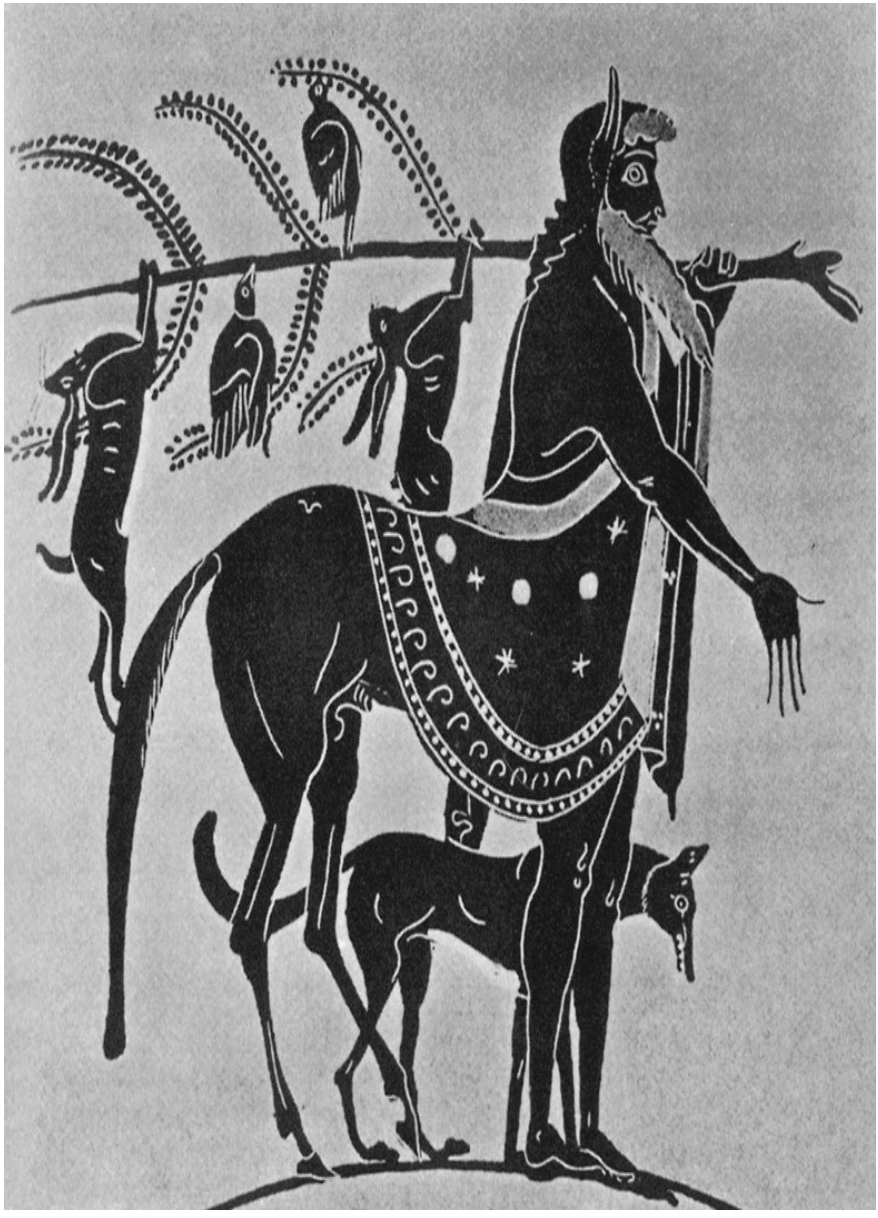
49. Head of Asclepius in Mantua



50 and 51. Head of a young man in the Palazzo Colonna, Rome

52. Asclepius and Telesphorus

53. Telesphorus



54. The centaur Chiron

ΠΕΡΓΑΜΗΝΩΝ.
ΒΝΕΩΚΟΡΩΝ

55. Cult statue of Asclepius

NIKAIEΩN

56. Asclepius riding a winged serpent

57. Head of Asclepius from the Baths of Caracalla

NOTES

FOREWORD

1.

‘Myths concerning the conception of Dionysus’, Maia 4, 1951, 12; ‘The etymology according to Kretzschmer, from *anomia’, 18 ff.

2.

‘The Origin of the Dionysian Religion According to the Current State of Research, Research Association of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia’, Issue 58, Cologne, 1956; the reading Labyrinthoio potnia according to Palmer, Bull. Inst. Class. Stud. Univ. London 2, 1955, 40.

3.

‘The Layers of Mythology and Their Study’, Universitas 9, 1954, 637 ff., Maia 4, 1951, 1 ff.

4.

‘Symbolism in Ancient Religion’, in K. Kerényi, In the Footsteps of Myth, Munich-Vienna, 1967, pp. 213–220.

5.

Cf. ‘The Aegean Festival”,in K. Kerényi, Humanistic Soul Research, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 92–119.

6.

See ‘Introduction’ to C. G. Jung/K. Kerényi, Introduction to the Essence of Mythology, Hildesheim, 1980; introductory address to ‘Niobe’, in Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, pp. 259–263, and ‘Umgang mit Göttlichem’, in K. Kerényi, Wege und Weggenossen I, Munich-Vienna, 1985, pp. 11–84.

7.

p. 99, line 6: from above one can read ‘Son of the father god Cronos’.

THE DIVINE DOCTOR

1.

Monograph: M. Besnier, L’Ile Tibérine dans l’àntiquité, Paris, 1902; the main facts regarding the medieval and later history of the island: ibid., p. 3 ff. and the Baedeker guide to Central Italy and Rome; on the existing monuments: L. Homo, La Rome antique, Paris, 1921, p. 336; H. Jordan, Sugli avanzi dell’antica decorazione dell’Isola Tiberina, Ann. Ist. Corr. Arch. 1867, 389 ff.: on new discoveries: M. Morella, Notizie intorno a 5 statue rinvenute nell’Isola Tiberina, Not. Scavi, 1943, 265 ff.

2.

Paus. V11, 11. From Aelius Aristides, a great admirer of Asclepius in the 2nd century AD, there are two panegyrics on the spring, that is, the water of the Asclepeion of Pergamon: speeches 39 and 53. These and the sources on Asclepius cited later can be found translated into English in
E. J. and L. Edelstein, Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies I, Baltimore, 1945. This work was not published until The Divine Physician had essentially been completed. Nor did the author subsequently find any reason to make changes; although our points of

However different our views and criteria may be, we can only recommend this rich and accessible collection to the reader.

3.

Hippocr. Opera, ed. I. L. Ilberg, Corp. Med. Graec., 1927, 1, p. 5; translated into German in the small and highly recommended book by Walter Müri, Der Arzt im Altertum, Munich, 1938.

4.

Book X 47 and Periocha XI; Valerius Maximus I 8, 2; Anonymus (Aurelius Victor) vir. il. 22, 1–3; Ovid, Met. XV 622–744; comp. Ernst Schmidt, Transmissions of Cults, Hist. Rel. Essays and Preliminary Studies VIII 2, Giessen, 1909 and G. Wissowa, Religion und Kultus der Römer, 2nd edition, Munich, 1912. The critic Wissowa rightly notes that Schmidt's criticism is greatly exaggerated.

5.

Book X 47: a year blessed with many good things scarcely sufficed to alleviate a single evil, a plague that ravaged both the city and the countryside.

6.

Iliad I 49–52; translated by J. H. Voss.

7.

Telephus, wounded by Achilles, received the oracle: ὁ τρώσας ϰαὶ ἰάσεται, Paroemiographi II 736, 28; L. Preller/C. Robert, Greek Mythology II 3, Berlin, 1921, 1139, 2. On the motif and examples from Klaros, see O. Weinreich, Ancient Miraculous Cures, Studies in Beliefs

On the Miracles of the Greeks and Romans, Hist. Rel. Essays and Preliminary Studies VIII 1, Giessen, 1909, pp. 147 ff.

8.

Cf. K. Buresch, Klaros. Investigations into the Oracles of Late Antiquity, Leipzig, 1889, 10 ff. and 81, Weinreich op. cit. 150.

9.

On the snake perched on the tree in the background, probably added by the Roman copyist, see K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niob, Munich-Vienna, 1980, pp. 358–385.

10.

On this meaning of religio: W. F. Otto, Arch. für Rel. Wiss., 14. 1911. 104; K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, pp. 55 ff.

11.

Ovid, Met., XV 628 ff., translated by J. G. K. Schlüter.

12.

Macrobius, Sat. I 17, 15; Wissowa, op. cit., 294.

13.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 121–127; translated and commented on by R. Herzog, 'Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros', Philologus Suppl., 22, 1931, 3. See also Weinreich's commentary in 'Dittenbergers Sylloge', Inscr. gr. III³ 1920, 1168 ff.

14.

Plutos 400–413 and 633 et seq.

15.

Apocalypse, ed. Albatros, 1932, 166.

16.

Kallim Hymn. Del. 210; in K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 367.

17.

Aelian, De nat. An. XI 3; ibid., p. 380.

18.

In Jacob Flach (Swiss), in his ‘Silly Song of May’. According to Paus. II 28, 1, this ‘blonder’ species of snake is said to be found only in Epidaurus.

19.

XV 742: Phoebeius anguis.

20.

J. J. Bachofen, Collected Works I, Basel, 1943, 104.

21.

See Wissowa (note 4), 308.

22.

Livy II 5, 2; Dionysius Hal. V 13; Plutarch Publ. 8; cf. L. Euing, ‘Die Sage von Tanaquil’, in Frankfuerter Studien II, 1933, 40 ff.

23.

F. Altheim, Römische Rel.-Gesch II, Berlin, 1932, 71 ff. and A History of Roman Religion, London, 1938, 207 ff. according to A. v. Blumenthal, Hesychstudien 38.

24.

Altheim, Röm. Rel.-Gesch. II, 80 ff.; A History of Roman Rel., p. 113.

25.

A temple was dedicated to both deities on the Tiber Island on 1 January: to Asclepius in 291 BC, to Vediovis in 194 BC; the inscription from the aforementioned calendar (Fasti Praenestini): CIL I^2 231; cf. also C. Koch, ‘Der Römische Jupiter’, Frankf. Stud. XIV, 1937, p. 81.

26.

Servius ad Verg. Aen. XI 785; Wissowa (note 4) 238, Altheim (note 23).

27.

The essential link between the two deities is evidenced not only by the shared date of the ‘birth’ of their temples—the highly significant 1st January—but also by the curious fact that sick slaves deported to the island by order of Emperor Claudius were to be set free once they had recovered: cf. Suetonius, Claudius 25; Cassius Dio, LX 29. The deity who healed was Asclepius, but the one who set free was Vediovis, who usually dealt with the right of asylum and the protection of slaves; cf. Altheim, Röm. Rel.-Gesch II, 55; A History of Rom. Rel., 262; Koch (note 25) 78; K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 118. The relationship between healing and liberation attests to a single sanctuary of sacred power that was common to both gods.

28.

Liv. IV 25, 3; 29, 7; XL 51, 6; Wissowa (note 4) 294; the source for the invocation of the Vestal Virgins has been mentioned previously, in note 12.

29.

Paus. VI 20, 2–4. The following description of Hieron of Epidaurus, according to Paus. II, with commentary by J. G. Frazer, Pausanias’ Description of Greece III, London, 1898, 236 ff., according to his own judgement.

30.

Comp. P. Wolters, ‘Darstellungen des Asclepios’, in Ath. Mitt. 17, 1892, 1 ff.; this coincides with the essay by H. Brunn, ‘Asclepios und Zeus’, in his work: Griechische Götterideale, Munich, 1893.

31.

Von Wolters, op. cit.

32.

Frazer (note 29) according to P. Cavvadias, Fouilles d'Epidaure, Athens, 1893. For the following comparison, see also Herzog (note 13).

33.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 121

God, fortune, blessings

The healing powers of Apollo and Asclepius

34.

W. Jaeger draws attention to the corresponding Hippocratic idea that there is a natural healing process which the physician must respect until nature helps itself; to put it more precisely: 'go and give aid', βοηθεῖ: cf. the English edition of his Paideia III, Oxford, 1945, 28.

35.

Thus Herzog (note 13); however, the god who 'rushes to give aid' (βοηθεῖ) is, for the Greeks, above all Apollo, who is given the epithet Boedromios or Boathoos. (The latter epithet has been handed down as the name of the month).

36.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 128 with the commentary by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'Isilo of Epidaurus', Philol. Unters. IX, Berlin, 1886.

37.

Paus. II 26, 3–5.

38.

Greek Inscription IV² 1, 128, 43:

She was born in Phrygia and was named Aegla.

This was her surname; the other name was Koronis.

Thus the verses hitherto not covered by Wilamowitz's interpretation, who on p. 18 comments on the last five words: 'Here τὸ κάλλος must be in the accusative, and should be accepted in place of a prepositional relationship with διά, which cannot be dispensed with here. There are so many ideas that, at first, I defended the need for a change, since all searching and pondering were in vain, and I wished to express my hope that another might be more fortunate. Now, however, Isilo inspires my confidence, and his recourse to stammering—essentially because the meaning demands it, even if it is well or poorly expressed—remains a conjecture; that is to say, it can only improve the form of expression'. Other conjectures were also made (they can be found in the Greek Inscriptions), but they are not convincing. There is therefore no alternative but to accept the 'stammering', but not out of contempt for Isilo, whom, incidentally, Wilamowitz does not hold in high regard.

39.

The word κορώνη means corvus cornix, and likely also corvus corone; cf. Liddell-Scott's Greek dictionary. However, it may also refer to anything that is bent or twisted. The first meaning seems more reasonable, as this interpretation, linked to another proper name—the name of the city Korone—is attested in both image and word; cf. Paus. IV 34, 5–6. We shall also see that the crow plays a role in the story of Coronis.

40.

This is the literal text: ἐπίϰλησιν δέ νιν Αἴγλας ματϱὸς ’Ασϰλαπιὸν
Apollo named her.

41.

Cf. Wilamowitz (note 36), 91 ff.; he arranged the epithets mentioned in a comprehensible context. H. Ammann assumes a pre-Greek origin, Glotta 25, 1936, 5 ff. Anaphe is the name of the island to be mentioned later, cf. ἀνάπτω ‘to kindle’ and ἀφή ‘the kindling’.

42.

Greek Inscription IV² 1, 198–209 et seq., in the sense of ‘Apollo and Asclepius’.

43.

Perhaps this was Zeus’s golden dog, the one stolen by Pandareus or Tantalus; cf. the variants of the legend in Preller/Robert (note 7) II 1, 378.

44.

Schol. In Sophocles’ Electra 6.

45.

Pausanias X 14, 7; Altheim (note 23), Röm. Rel.-Gesch., I, 52 ff.; A History of Rom. Rel., 261; K. Kerényi, Apollon and Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 40.

46.

Poseidon: Paus. III 23, 2; Chiron in chap. V; Silenus: Pindar fr. 142 in Paus. III 25,2.

47.

In Piraeus: Inscr. gr. II² 4962.

48.

Compare the accounts of the mythical miraculous deeds of Asclepius, his death and his tomb in Edelstein (note 2), pp. 66–120.

49.

Hesych, ed. R. Herzog, Arch. Rel.-Wiss., 10, 1907, 225.

50.

Further information on this: ‘Wolf und Ziege am Fest Der Lupercalia’, Mélanges de philologie, de littérature et d’histoire aciennes offerts à J. Marouzeau par ses collègues et élèves étrangers, Paris, 1948.

51.

In this sense, according to Goethe, see Farbenlehre, §916 (symbolic means that which ‘coincides entirely with nature’ and ‘immediately communicates its meaning’, as opposed to the allegorical), the concept of the symbol and all that is symbolic; cf. K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 52 ff., completely misunderstood by W. J. Verdenius, Mnemosyne, 1945, 58, who unwittingly demonstrates how the symbolic should not be conceived. Such symbols are not the result of speculation and intention, as is the case with dream symbols.

52.

Greek Inscription IV² 1, 122, XXV (similar 121 XX); generally the translations according to Herzog. On the healing sleep in the temple, the incubatio, with extensive bibliography, Edelstein (note 2) 145 ff. and Dr C. A. Meier in the first publication of the Jung Institute, Zurich, 1948.

53.

Greek Inscription IV² 1, 121, XVII.

54.

Greek Inscription IV² 1, 123, XLIV.

55.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 123, 135.

56.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 417, 438, 424–425. In later periods, consulting the oracle also took the form of mystery processions: cf. S. Eitrem, Orakel und Mysterien am Ausgang der Antike, Albae Vigiliae N. F. V., Zurich, 1947, 66 ff.

57.

Pluto 640–641

I shall raise my voice to the young man and

with mighty roars I call upon Asclepius.

For the epithet εὔπαις (‘the beautiful’), cf. the synonym καλλίπαις as an epithet of two mystery deities: of the Kabeiros, Hippol. Ref. V 6, and Persephone, Eur. Or. 946 (K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart 1996, pp. 226–242); for φέγγος ‘the light’ in the sense of the mysteries, Aristoph. Ranae, 456:

for to us alone the sun

and gentle light are a

source of joy, we who

have been initiated…

(“For us alone are the sun and gentle light…”).

58.

Hippol. Ref. V 8; cited in Jung/Kerényi, Introduction to the Essence of Mythology, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 205 ff.

59.

The ἄρρητος κούρα, in Eur. Hel. 1307; fr. 63; Karkinos in Diod. Sic. V 5, I; cited in Jung/Kerényi, Introduction…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 167.

60.

Literature in M. P. Nilsson, Gesch. d. griech. Rel. I, Munich, 1941, 620 ff.; see Jung/Kerényi, Introduction…, Hildesheim, p. 200; the word Mysteria generally signifies the festival of concealment: K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 42–53.

61.

Jung/Kerényi, Introduction…, Hildesheim, pp. 166–176; 251–257.

62.

Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 122, XLII.

63.

Paus. II 10, 3; the reference to be mentioned shortly: Inscr. gr. IV² 1, 122, XXXI.

64.

Paus. II, 27, 3. Aristoph. Plut. 644–645 offers the parallel passage, possibly the explanation. The woman who hears the call, mentioned above in note 57, must drink the wine quickly…

65.

P. Cavvadias, Πραϊτικά τῆς ἀρχ. ἑτ. 1882, p. 81.

66.

F. Noack, Jahrb. Deutsch, Arch. Inst. 42, 1927, 75, regards the circular structure as the oldest form of cult ‘construction’, around which the tymele was later built. We owe a publication covering all circular religious structures to F. Robert, Thymélé. Recherches sur la signification et la destination des monuments circulaires de l’architecture religieuse de la Grèce, Paris, 1940, which concludes that chthonic blood sacrifices were practised in the labyrinths; however, this remains unprovable. Even if it were provable and were to be proven, one would still have to ask whether this purpose – the performance of blood sacrifices for the underworld – would in itself explain the form of the structure. On the meaning of the labyrinth motif in general (the path back to life through death): K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 178–214.

67.

See W. F. Otto, The Gods of Greece, 2nd ed., Frankfurt am Main, 1934, pp. 95 ff.

68.

See the published work of the German Archaeological Institute: Kos I, Berlin, 1932, by R. Herzog and P. Schatzmann; and also A. Neppi Modona, 'L'Isola di Coo nell'antichità classica', in Memorie pubbl. Ist. Storico-Archeol. Di Rodi I, Rhodes, 1933.

69.

Vitruvius I 2, 7: 'And the natural beauty will be such that, first of all, for all temples, the healthiest regions and springs of water should be chosen in suitable locations where shrines are to be erected, and then especially for Aesculapius and Salus (that is, Asclepius and Hygieia), for by these gods the sick are seen to be cured through medicine.' For when sick bodies have been moved from a pestilential to a healthy place and supplied with water from healthy springs, they recover more quickly. That an elevated location is also the rule is clarified in Plut. Quaest. Rom. 94.

70.

Cf. R. Herzog, Koische Forschungen und Funde, Leipzig, 1899, p. 202.

71.

Herzog, p. 204; on Charondas: Diodorus XII, p. 12.

72.

K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 14–41.

73.

Ibid.; further on him: J. Schuhmacher, Antike Medizin I, Berlin, 1940, 66 ff.

74.

Wilamowitz (note 36); Herzog (note 70) 172.

75.

Herodotus VII 99.

76.

Letter 11 of Hippocrates, written by an unknown author who was still familiar with the situation in Cos; published in Littré's *Werken des Hippocrates*, vol. IX, and in R. Hercher's *Epistolgraphi Graeci*, Paris, 1871, p. 292.

77.

'Ανάληψις τοῦ ῥάβδου. Cf. Nilsson, Griech, Feste, 411. A description of the rod of Asclepius (dei medici baculum) as an unplaned tree branch is found in Apuleius, Met. 14: quod ramulis semiamputatis nodosum gerit.

78.

Compare generally: H. Diels, 'Die Scepter der Universität', Rector's Address, Berlin, 1905; in detail: Sorlin Dorigny in Daremberg-Saglios, Dictionaire des Antiquités IV, 1115 ff.

79.

Sacred to Hades: Plin. Nat. Hist. XVI 139; cf. also F. Lajard, ‘Recherches sur le culte du cyprès pyramidal’, Mém. de l’Inst. de France, Acad. des Inscr. XX 2, 1854, 199 ff.; J. H. Dierbach, Flora Mythologica, Frankfurt am Main, 1833, 50; A. De Gubernatis, Mythologie des plantes II, Paris, 1882, 118; J. Murr, Die Pflanzenwelt in der griech. Mythologie, Innsbruck, 1890, 124; O. Gruppe, Griech. Mythologie und Rel. Gesch. I, Munich, 1906, 789, 1; F. Cumont, La stèle du danseur d’Antibes et son décor végétal, Paris, 1942, p. 39.

80.

Gellius, Noct. Att. V 12, p. 11; Wissowa (note 4) 237.

81.

Ovid Met. X 106 ff.; by no means is she exclusively associated with the island of Keos. According to another tradition, she was Cretan, cf. Serv. Ad Verg. Aen. III 680; Gruppe (note 79) 788, 6.

82.

cf. Paus. X 13.5 and the coin images from Kaulonia, which depict Apollo with a deer as his favourite animal.

83.

Comp. the 2nd fictional letter by Hippocrates and the supposed speech by Hippocrates’ son Thessalos in the same collection of letters, no. 27, in which the aforementioned legend is recounted.

84.

The most likely explanation is the analogy with the Roman circus as a venue for similar races; on its original meaning in the context of ancient Roman sun worship, cf. C. Koch, 'Gestirnverehrung im alten Italien', in Frankfurter Studien III, 1933, 41 ff.

85.

W. R. Paton and E. L. Hicks, The Inscriptions of Cos, Oxford, 1891, 387, 27; Herzog (note 70) 200, 2.

86.

Wellmann in Pauly-Wissowa's Realenc. V 1663 and the family tree alongside Modona (note 68) 119 (according to Pomtow), with further references.

87.

Herzog, 'Heilige Gesetze von Kos', Abh. Akad, Berlin, 1928, in Phil.-Hist. no. 6, p. 48.

88.

Compare the inscriptions cited by Herzog in the same place. According to Schol., in Aristoph. Plut. 701, Asclepius' wife is the daughter of Helios, Lampetie: perhaps the oldest attestation of a wife of Asclepius; cf. Edelstein (note 2) II 87, 43. On Lampetie, daughter of Helios according to Hom. Od. XII 132,
K. Kerényi, Töchter der Sonne, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 65 ff.

89.

Paus. II 11, 7. He is identical to the Genius Cucullatus, a figure widely known in the Roman Empire. Cf. R. Egger, Wiener-Prähist. Zeitschr. 19, 1932, 311

ff., Verf: Egyetemes Philologiai Közlöny 57, 1933, 156 ff. (German) and F. M. Heichelheim, Archaeologia Aeliana, 4, 12, 1935, 187. It even survives as Can Cucufatus in Christianity: I. Waldapfel, Martyr occultus, Lyka Emlékkönyv, Budapest, 1944, 138 ff. (Hungarian).

90.

According to Pausanias II 11.7, who also identifies Euamerion with Telephus. The latter was sacrificed to at the Asclepeion of Titane as if he were a god, whilst Alexanor, who was associated with him, was likewise venerated with chthonic sacrifices, but only after sunset. The luminous nature of Telephus, concealed beneath his garments, is revealed in the epiphany, as Aelius Aristides explains: the opposite wall reflects the radiance as if it were sunlight; cf. J. Schmidt in Roscher V, 310.

91.

Edited and translated into German by O. Crusius and R. Herzog, Leipzig, ²1926; translated into English by A. D. Knox, London, 1929; and into French by J. Arbuthnot Nairn and L. Laloy, Paris, 1928. For the next scene: R. Wünsch, 'Dankopfer an Asklepios', Archiv für Rel.-Wiss. 7, 1904, 95 ff. and R. Herzog, Arch. Rel.-Wiss. 10, 1907, 201 ff.

92.

Inscr. gr. II-III² 3, 4533; P. Maas, 'Epidaurische Hymnen', Schriften der Königsberger Ges. für Geisteswiss. 9, 5, 1933, 151 and under note 103 of the work by Kutsch to be cited.

93.

Plato, Phaedo 118a. Compare the earlier account of the afterlife
'true' world, and its 'true light' (109 d 7).

94.

See Jaeger, Paideia III 3 ff., for the characterisation—an assessment of human history—which confirms our historical-religious view in a most welcome manner.

95.

Περὶ ἱερῆς νόσου p. 615, 1 Kühn: ἀλλὰ πάντα θεῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα πάντα.

96.

On Beauty, pp. 69–70 Kühn: for this reason … to transfer wisdom into medicine and medicine into wisdom. For the physician is a philosopher of equal standing.

97.

On Beauty, p. 73 Kühn: for much is not a matter of reasoning, but of the aid of things. Compare notes 34 and 35 and the expression: τὰ τοῦ ᾽Ασκληπιοῦ βοηθήματα, in the pseudo-collection of Hippocratic letters, Epistolographi Graeci 290, 2.

98.

The selection criteria are more based on physical characteristics than on archaeology. Among archaeologists, there is no consensus regarding the artistic assessment of the originals, except in the case of Type II. The surviving statues are, without exception, Roman copies. A. Furtwängler attributes Type I, in his *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1893, 394 ff., to Myron, a great sculptor of the 5th century. It may be regarded as an original individual figure, which was only later joined to a figure of Hygieia, and the resulting group was included in a

a superficial imitation (Rome, Palazzo Barberini, Furtwängler, fig. 60). Ludwig Curtius, in his ‘Zeus und Hermes’ (Röm. Mitt. Erg. I 1931, 64), regards the same statue as a ‘Roman pastiche’. On a firmer basis, K. A. Neugebauer’s assessment of the ‘Asclepius’ (87. Berliner Winkelmannsprogramm 1921) tells us that it is of Type II, ‘a statue of the Asclepius type’. Created by an Attic artist in the mid-5th century, of Type III, it was attributed by Arndt, with some hesitation, to Praxiteles, in the Arndt-Amelung text “Einzelaufnahmen” (nos. 219–220), despite the fact that the statue, and indeed the book, are rather examples of a late Hellenistic conception of Asclepius. The ‘Imberbe’, in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican, belongs to Type II, as a robed statue, although it is not clear ‘why a classical type of statue is combined with an inappropriate head of a young man; it may be an idealised image’ (Neugebauer, p. 42).

99.

C. Becatti, ‘Il ritratto di Ippocrate’, Atti Pont. Acc. Roma. Arch. p. III, Rendic. 21, 1945–1946, 122 ff. The ‘chief physician’ (ἀρχίατρος) K. Markios Demetrios – his name may be derived from the line of physicians of Demetrius in Thessaly (for further information on this, see note 179) – erected a tomb around the year 100 AD for Julia Procura, aged twenty-nine, and her family, in the Porto necropolis, near the mouth of the Tiber. In the tomb there was a statue of the deceased young woman, in the form of Hygieia (cf. G. Calza, La Necropoli del Porto di Roma nell’Isola Sacra, figs. 121 and 122) and also a plinth bearing the inscription published by M. Guarducci in the same volume, p. 143 ff.: Βραχὺς ὁ βίος μακρὸν δὲ τὸν κατὰ γᾶς αἰῶνα τελετῶμεν (sic) βροτοί. πᾶσι δὲ μοῖρα φέρεσθαι δαίμονος αἰσαν ἅ τις ἂν τύχηι. The opening line: ‘Life is short’ resembles Hippocrates’ phrase ὁ μὲν βίοσ βραχύς; the continuation is appropriate to the place and its deities: ‘But long is the time that we mortals remain beneath the earth. Fate, however, compels us all to bear this burden that a god has given us, to the extent that it falls to us’. The head, belonging to this plinth, is a repetition of a well-known portrait, which until now was attributed to the philosopher Carneades, though without any evidence to support this. One can hardly be mistaken in believing, as Becatti does, that the long-sought portrait of Hippocrates has finally been found,

which also corresponds to the images on the coins of Cos (in K. Schefeld, Die Bildnisse der antiken Dichter, Redner und Denker, Basel, 1943, 172, 24–25). The somewhat damaged bust from Porto is housed in the Ostia Museum, no. 98.

100.

Compare the alleged speech of Thessalos, no. 27 of the pseudo-collection of Hippocratic letters, Epist. Gr. 316, 45.

101.

Compare the alleged Δόγμα ’Aϑηναίων, no. 25 of the pseudo-collection of Hippocratic letters, with the commentary by Herzog (note 70), 215.

102.

Hom. Il. IV 194, XI 518, cf. XI 835. The latter passage shows that the epithet ἀμύμων applies not only to the deceased, but to the good physician in general, one who has no specific name.

103.

The following appears in the first draft: Eranos-Jahrbuch XII, ‘Studien zum Problem des Archetypischen’, Festgabe C. G. Jung, Zurich, 1945, p. 33 ff., with a critique of the theoretical part of the work by F. Kutsch, ‘Attische Heilgötter und Heilheroen’, in Rel.-Gesch. Versuche und Vorarbeiten XII 3, Giessen, 1913, a compendium which is also useful for the sources in general indicated here.

104.

nscr. gr. II-III² 3, 4960.

105.

From ξένος ἰατρός, Lucian, Toxaris, p. 1.

106.

Change in the meaning of this word: E. Rohde, Psyche, 2, and subsequent editions, Freiburg/Br., 1889, 154 ff. On the Heros latros, the opposite of the Götternamen by H. Usener, Bonn, 1896, 149–153: 185, 3.

107.

Reproduced from Kutsch (note 103).

108.

Bekker, Anecdota Graeca 262, 16.

109.

Ibid. 11.

110.

The inscriptions in Kutsch (note 103), 48–52.

111.

Paus. III 26, 10.

112.

See note 7 above.

113.

In Preller/Robert (note 7) II 3, 1138 et seq.

114.

Apollodorus III 104; Diodorus IV 33.

115.

In the city of Coronis, whose name is mentioned above in note 39 with the meaning of ‘crow’, Paus. IV 34.7.

116.

Fr. 7 Kinkel; VII Allen; Paus. III 26.9.

117.

Schol. BT Eust. Ad Hom. Il. IX 515.

118.

Similar to the generous cult of pre-Homeric souls, regarding which Rohde (note 106), 1–110, makes no changes to this point in W. F. Otto, Die Manen, Berlin, 1923.

119.

This interpretation is plausible given the reference we are about to make to two of Macaon’s sons.

120.

Paus. II 38, 6.

121.

Pausanias IV 3, 10; 30, 3.

122.

See Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (note 36), p. 45.

123.

This is how his name is written on painted vases; the form found in literary texts is Cheiron, cf. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Neue Jahrbücher 33, 1914, 242.

124.

Hom. Il. II 729–733.

125.

Hom. Il. IV 192 ff.

126.

Comp. Hom. Il. XI 830–832; the sources on plants in Stählin, Das hellenische Thessalien, Stuttgart, 1924, 43, 7; the botanical material in Murr (note 79), 223 ff.

127.

K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion. Stuttgart, 1995, p. 109.

128.

See Part IV of this series, Prometheus.

129.

Hom. Il. V. 392–394:

And when he had spoken thus, as the priest of

Amphitryon, standing on the right, was reading

from the three-rowed scroll; then a pang of sorrow

seized him.

130.

Cf. K. Kerényi, Töchter der Sonne (note 88), p. 135 ff.

131.

Hom. Il. V 402 and 901.

132.

Hom. Od. IV 231–232:

and each of the seers, having been granted by Apollo

ἰᾶσθαι·ἦ γὰρ Παιήονός εἰσι γενέθλης.

Thus, according to Aristarchus, the accepted text reads

as follows: ἰητρὸς δὲ ἕκαστος ἐπιστάμενος περὶ

πάντων ἀνθρώπων·ἦ γὰρ Παιήονός εἰσι γενέθλης.

133.

Plut. De El 389 c.

134.

Pindar, Paean II (fr. 36 Bowra). Cf. generally A. v. Blumenthal, ‘Paian’ in RE.

135.

Paean IX (fr. 44 Bowra).

136.

Verf., Apollon-Epiphanien, 30 ff.

137.

Hom. Il. XI 514:

for he is a man worthy of many others.

138.

Homer, Iliad XI 833–836.

139.

See above, note 126.

140.

Preller/Robert (note 7) II 3, 1148.

141.

Pind. Ol. IX 70 ff.

142.

Paus. III 26, 6.

143.

Paus. II 26, 6 and as for Rhodes, they call the sacred district ‘the sacred district’. But the statue of Machaon is a bronze statue; and upon his head rests a wreath, which the Messenians call a ‘jifos’ in their local dialect. We do not know what was special about this crown; we wish only to emphasise the strange yet apparently characteristic crowns found on the many statues of Asclepius.

144.

Schol. Od. XI. 520–21.

145.

Schol. Il. A I 59; Apollod. Epit. 3, 17; Pind. Isthm. VIII 49.

146.

See generally: P. Philippson, Thessalische Mythologie, Zurich, 1944, 9 ff.

147.

Homer, Iliad II 729–31.

148.

Herodas IV 1; the earliest accounts from Thessaly and the Peloponnese in Weber, ‘Asclepio’, Philologus 87, 1932, 389. We would like to draw attention to this dissertation in the same vein as we have done with the one mentioned above, note 2 Edelstein. Compare the latest works by U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Der Glaube der Hellenen, Berlin, 1931, II 223 ff.

149.

C 4; U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (note 36).

150.

Strabo, Geogr. XIV 1, 39.

151.

Comp. L. Ziehen, Ath. Mitt. 17, 1892, 195 ff. and E. Kirsten in RE VII A1, 146 ff., under ‘Tricca’.

152.

P. Kretschmer, Glotta 16, 1927, 173.

153.

Herzog, (note 70), pp. 75 and 191.

154.

S. Eitrem in RE XX I, under ‘Febe’, p. 345, 3.

155.

Properz II 2, 11; cf. also ‘Hermes, the guide of souls’, Part II of this book.

156.

See op. cit. and Jung/Kerényi, Introduction to the Essence of Mythology, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 82 ff.; on the Unnameable, see note 59 above.

157.

Hippol. Ref. V 8: ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρά.

158.

῾Ισχυς and ἰσχύς. Wilamowitz (note 36), 81, 54, argues that the name has nothing to do with ἰσχύς, but should instead be understood as an abbreviated form of Ischomachos, for example. The Latin translation ‘Valens’ (in Cicero, De nat. deor. III 56) shows that at a time when there was still a keen sensitivity towards the Greek language, a different view was held. Whether it is Cicero who is right, or Wilamowitz, it ultimately amounts to the same thing: Ischomachos, ‘he who fights with strength’ – expressed in a more heroic manner – is nothing more than ἰσχυρός.

159.

Consider the organisation of the Greek calendar, which is not divided into four weeks but into three decades: W. Kubitschek,
‘Outline of the Calculation of Time in Antiquity’, *Manual of the Science of Antiquity* I 7, Munich, 1927, p. 28; and W. H. Roscher, ‘Enneadische Studien’, *Abh. Sächs. Ges. Wiss.*, Leipzig, 26, 1907, p. 1 ff.

160.

Arguments in favour of this interpretation, along with other parallels: K. Kérenyi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, pp. 264–278.

161.

For a general overview: A handbook of German superstition regarding the ‘crow’ and the ‘raven’, in the mythological sense: P. W. Schmidt, Der Ursprung der Gottesidee, Munich, 1912, I 326 ‘Sonnenfalke gegen die Mondkrähe’ and several others; see the indexes of the individual volumes.

162.

Hesiod fr. 122 Rzach.

163.

Verf. In Jung/Kerényi, Introduction to the essence of the mythology, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 207 ff.

164.

Preller/Robert (note 7) II 1, 26 ff.

165.

Ibid. II 1, 12 ff.

166.

Plut. De def. or. 418 A; 421 B; Quaest. Gr. 12, 293 B.

167.

Stählin (note 126) 43, 10.

168.

Pyth. III 25 ff.

169.

F. Bölte in RE XX 1, under ‘Foloe’, p. 515.

170.

Best collection of all variants: RE 1112, 2308 under ‘Chiron’ (Escher); on the relationship with Heracles: p. 2305.

171.

On the centaur Elatus: Apollodorus V 5, 4, 4 ff. A fir tree trunk is the standard attribute of centaurs in ancient art: Preller/Robert (note 7) II 1, 5. Elatus, as the father of Isquis, already appears in the Thessalian tradition as one of the Lapiths: Preller/Robert II 1, p. 8. This in no way alters the fact that the original figure is ‘centauric’.

172.

Preller/Robert (note 7) II 1, 21 ff.

173.

Wissowa (note 4) 237; Koch (note 25).

174.

Preller/Robert (note 7) II 1, p. 19; Stählin (note 126) p. 42.

175.

Preller/Robert II 1, 20; Stählin 43.

176.

Stählin 43.

177.

Pliny the Elder, Natural History, Book XXV, 66.

178.

Staged by Aeschylus, comp. Preller/Robert 1 101; Verf., Prometheus, 74 ff.

179.

Demetrias was not founded until 293 BC by Demetrius Poliorcetes. The medical lineage, which according to Heracles, fr. 60 (Preller/Robert II1, 20), descends from Chiron, must have been an older Thessalian lineage. The name of the physician cited (note 99) may have been this, like that of the city's Heros Ktistes.

180.

Preller/Robert II 1, 20, note 5.

181.

Hesiod fr. 125 Rzach.

182.

Stählin (note 126) 43, 1.

183.

The area north of Lake Beobes, in addition to Tricca, was considered a birthplace of Asclepius. When the Homeric Hymn XVI 3 to Asclepius generally mentions the plain of Dotis, it probably refers to the twin hill Didimoy, to which Hesiod fr. 122 alludes: Stählin
59. Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* IV 616, mentions the name Lakereia, a name which, incidentally, with a different ending, is a permanent epithet of

the crow: cf. λαϰέρυζα ϰορώνη in Hes. Op. 747 and Aristoph. Aves 609.

184.

He is the healer of the Phoenix, Apollod. III 175, cf. Escher (note 170) 2306. An eye ointment bearing his name is mentioned: Cels. VI 6, 20 according to M. Wellmann, ‘Augenärtze’, in RE II 2, 2311.

185.

On Apollo as a healing god: R. Ganszyniec, Archiv. f. Gesch. der Med. 15, 1923, 33 ff.; cf. also A. Pazzini, Il significato degli ‘ex voto’ ed il concetto della divinità guaritrice, Acc. Lincei, Rome, 1935, 66 ff. We add an important testimony, as indicated by C. Koch in Der römische Jupiter, Frankfurt am Main, 1937, p. 80, concerning the cult of Apollo among the Julii – essentially referring to the cult of Vediovis. The god, ripe for birth, who is nevertheless violently delivered from his mother’s womb, was Asclepius. According to Serv. Comm. in Verg. Aen. X 316, all those born violently by caesarean section were sacred to Apollo: omnes qui secto matris ventre procreantur ideo sunt Apollini consecrati, quia deus est medicinae, but quem lucem sortiuntur.

ILLUSTRATIONS: THEME AND SOURCE

1.

Tiber Island, in Rome, before the 19th century, drawn by Giov. Battista Piranesi (1707–1778), who particularly highlighted the bust of Asclepius situated to the left of the centre of the image, next to the wall. Engraving printed on the binding: head of Asclepius. Bronze coin from Epidaurus, circa 350 BC, London, British Museum. Photograph: British Museum, London.

2.

The modern remains of the ancient, ship-shaped embankment of Tiber Island. The outlines of the bust of Asclepius and the staff with the serpent are still visible and, beside them, one of the bull's heads that adorned the ship-shaped island. Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae II 1, 891 Asclepius 396.

3.

A reconstruction of the island's ancient form by a 16th-century artist, in which, furthermore, in the top right-hand corner, he added a reproduction of the bust of Asclepius and the staff with the serpent. The obelisk erected in Late Antiquity, set on the western side facing the approach of ships, attests that the ship-shaped island was regarded as a solar ship. Cod. Vat. 3439, p. 42. Reproduced for Ciba.

4.

The Belvedere Apollo, perhaps regarded as the Apollo Medicus in Rome. The small snake on the tree trunk (both the snake and the

(the trunk is a later addition by a Roman copyist) represents the ‘benevolent serpent’ characteristic of the healing god. Rome, Vatican Museum. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

5.

Silver coin from Epidaurus, 350 BC, bearing the cult image of Asclepius. Beneath the throne is a dog. Ciba no. 30, 1936, reproduction.

6.

The serpent of the enthroned Asclepius, from the Pincian Hill in Rome. The god’s forearms, the serpent’s neck and other elements of the statue have been added, although the most essential part is ancient: the coils of the serpent wrapped around a sort of omphalos beneath the throne. Classical, 2nd century AD. Original photograph by Ciba.

7.

Aesculapios of Porto d’Anzio, the ancient Antium, where the legendary god first alighted. Magnificent Roman statue, Rome, Capitoline Museum. Circa 150 AD. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

8.

The arrival of the serpent of Asclepius on the Tiber Island, where it is received by Faunus, the god of the island. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles. Drawing reproduced for Ciba.

9.

Site plan of the sanctuary at Epidaurus. 1 Asclepeion, 2 Gymnasium, 3 Stadium, 4 Theatre, 5 Katagogion, 6 Kynortion. Drawing reproduced from Cavvadias’s plans for Ciba.

10.

Plan of the sanctuary at Epidaurus 1 Temple of Asclepius, 2 Stoa, 3 Great Altar, 4 Colonnades, 5 Baths, 6 Temple of Artemis. Drawn for Ciba based on plans by Cavvadias.

11.

Head of Asclepius from the island of Melos. London, British Museum. Circa 340 BC. Photograph: British Museum, London.

12.

Relief from the sanctuary at Epidaurus. Probably depicts the cult image of Asclepius. Athens, National Museum, 370–360 BC. From Brunn-Bruckmann: Denkmäler griechischer und römischer Skulptur, Munich, 1888–1932.

13.

Fragment of a statue of Asclepius, Athens, National Museum. Circa 250 BC. Photograph: Alinari, Florence.

14.

View towards the south-east of Mount Kynortion, from the sacred area of Epidaurus. It appears that this view was visible from the large pavilion for the sick, but in ancient times the mountains were more densely forested. Photograph by Ninon Hesse.

15.

Sacred relief from Epidaurus. Asclepius, his two sons Machaon and Podalirius, accompanied by dogs, three goddesses and two devotees. Athens, National Museum. Circa 360 BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

16.

Votive relief from the Asclepieion in Athens. A family offers a sacrifice to Asclepius: in the background, the goddess Hygieia and a snake descending from a tree in the forest can be seen. On the altar, fruit and cakes. Athens, National Museum. Circa 330 BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

17.

Drawing depicting a sacred relief that had been lost: Asclepius appears to the sick man. His raised left hand symbolises the god's personal and immediate connection with the sick man. Arch. F. Gesch. d. Med. Vol. 18. Leipzig, 1926.

18.

Sacred relief dedicated to Asclepius, in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Piraeus: it depicts the god's intervention. Hygieia stands behind him, and to the left are depicted the members of the sick man's family. Piraeus Museum. Circa 400 BC. From Schuchhardt, Walter-Herwig: 'Die Kunst der Griechen'. In Gesch. der Kunst, vol. 2, Berlin, 1940.

19.

Sacred relief by Archinos for the oracular god Amphiaraos, at Oropos (Attica). In the foreground, the patient is dreaming whilst the god operates on him. In the background is depicted the patient who, in reality, is being licked by a snake. Athens, National Museum. 380–370 BC. Photograph courtesy of the Archaeological Society, Athens.

20.

Asclepius in the form of a young traveller. Athens, National Museum. Circa 140 AD. Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae II 2, 633 Asclepius 22.

21.

Cult relief for Asclepius. A man and a boy offer a pig to the enthroned god and to Hygieia. A sacrificial animal for chthonic deities. Athens, National Museum, c. 300 BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

22.

Relief depicting initiation rituals before the so-called Lovatelli Urn: probably the Lesser Mysteries of Agrai, which prepare the way for the Great Mysteries of Eleusis. The initiate (Heracles) appears in a series of consecutive scenes: sacrificing a hidden pig and, finally, playing with the serpent of the goddess of the underworld. Rome, National Museum of the Baths. From the Esquiline Hill, early 2nd century AD. From Ludwig Deubner: Attic Festivals, Berlin, 1932.

23.

Fragment of a cult relief depicting Asclepius wearing a Dionysian headdress. He is surrounded by three goddesses, who are named in the inscription: Aceso, Iaso, Panacea. Athens, National Museum. Circa 340 BC. From Mitt. d. k. deutsch. Arch. Inst. Athenische Abtlg. vol. 17, Athens, 1892.

24a

View of the Asclepeion of Athens, on the southern slope of

and 24b.

Acropolis. At the top, the retaining walls of the Acropolis are visible, as well as part of the sacred area of Dionysus with monuments adorned with chorea (victory columns). Original photograph by Ciba.

25.

Labyrinth-shaped foundations of a Tolo (circular building) at the sanctuary of Epidaurus. Current state. Photo: H. Bloesch, Archäologisches Institut, University of Zurich.

26.

Cross-section of a reconstructed Tolo. From H. Lechat, Epidaure, Paris, 1895.

27.

The Asclepieion of Pergamon, reconstructed by H. Schleif. The circular building, corresponding to the Tolo of Epidaurus, is visible in the foreground. From O. Deubner, Das Asklepieion von Pergamon, Berlin, 1938.

28.

View of the outline of the Asclepieion of Cos: in antiquity it was covered in woodland. In the foreground are the remains of the great temple on the upper terrace. From the ‘Cos’ collection of the Archäologischen Institut des Deutschen Reiches, Volume I, Berlin, 1932.

29.

Central terrace of the Asclepieion of Kos. In the foreground, the remains of the great altar; in the background, the ruins of the older small temple. From the ‘Kos’ collection of the Archäologischen Institut des Deutschen Reiches, Volume I, Berlin, 1932.

30.

The Asclepeion of Cos in Hellenistic times. Reconstruction. From the collection of the Archäologischen Institut des Deutschen Reiches. Volume I, Berlin, 1932.

31.

Statue of Asclepius of Rhodes. It reproduces the ideal form of the god in his humanised, Hellenic figure. Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae II 2, 660 Asclepius 315.

32.

Fragment of a relief from the Asclepeion in Athens, showing the god’s staff with the serpent, and the god’s hand administering medicine to a sick person. 4th century BC. From Eugen Holländer, Plastik und Medizin, Stuttgart, 1912.

33.

Statuette of Hygieia of Rhodes, showing the goddess’s close relationship with the serpent. Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae V 2, 418 Hypnos/Somnus 315.

34.

A late Roman ivory carving depicting Hygieia. Her serpent is Apollonian: it emerges from a tripod. At the top, one can see ritual objects alluding to the mysteries: a wine jug with a serpent, and a basket –

cista mystica– with a snake and a divine child at the bottom, next to the goddess. Liverpool, late 4th century AD, Liverpool Museum, photograph by Giraudon.

35.

Statue of Asclepius with a child figure at his side, holding a rooster and a sacrificial knife. Located above the Roman Forum, next to the House of the Vestal Virgins, near the Spring of Juturna. Circa 150 AD.
C. Original photograph by Ciba.

36.

Asclepius in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, which aroused the utmost admiration and was taken for a copy of Myron's work: of our type I. A Roman work from the late 2nd century AD. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

37 and 38.

Photographs of details of the statue of Asclepius of type I, fig. 36. From Arndt-Amelung, Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiker Skulpturen, Munich 1893–1925.

39.

Asclepius in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence: Type II. A Roman work from around 150 AD; probably a reproduction of the cult statue created by Alcamenes for the Asclepeion in Athens, around 400 BC.
Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

40.

Asclepius in the Syracuse Museum. Second example of Type II: reproduction of the same Greek original. The omphalos situated on the

bottom left: normally associated with Apollo. Photograph by Anderson, Rome.

41.

Asclepius in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican: Type IIa. Reproduction of the Type II original, except for the head, which is that of a beardless youth. The depiction of a young Asclepius was not unusual in antiquity; what is striking is the Roman transformation of a figure who normally wears a beard into a beardless type. Photograph by Anderson, Rome.

42.

Head of the statue of Asclepius of type II a, fig. 41. Photograph courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute, Rome.

43.

Asclepius in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence: Type III. A classical work, dating from around 130 AD, combining the images of the physician writing books and a divine seer; it appears to be copied from an original from the early 4th century BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

44.

Detailed photographs of the Type III statue of Asclepius, fig. 43. From Arndt-Amelung, Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiker Skulpturen, Munich, 1893–1925.

45.

Hippocrates in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Initially, due to a misunderstanding and without sufficient evidence, he was mistaken for the philosopher Carneades; he was later identified by the fortuitous discovery of a copy

in the Museum of Ostia, and by his resemblance to the image on the coin of Cos. The earlier painting was created in the 2nd century BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

46.

Fragment of a cult relief of Asclepius accompanied by two goddesses, c. 390 BC, Athens, National Museum. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

47.

Cult relief from the city of Thyreatis (Peloponnese): a depiction of the family of Asclepius. Behind Asclepius, Hygieia can be seen, almost like a shadow. Next come the two sons, Machaon and Podalirius, and three goddesses should also be mentioned: Aceso, Iaso, Panacea (cf. fig. 23). Athens, National Museum, 370–360 BC. Photograph by Alinari, Florence.

48.

Image from a vase by the vase-painter Sosias. Circa 500 BC. Achilles heals the wounded Patroclus. Berlin, Antikensammlung. From Propyläen-Kunstgeschichte, vol. 2, Berlin, 1931.

49.

Head of Asclepius in Mantua. The statue belongs to Type II. The turban-shaped crown is more prominent here than in other examples, in which, however, this feature is not absent. Early 2nd century AD. From Arndt-Amelung, Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiker Skulpturen, Munich, 1893–1925.

50 and 51.

Head of a young man in the Palazzo Colonna, Rome. He is probably identified by the crown as the young Asclepius; and given the expressions of Apollo and the god of the underworld Eubuleus, it is with some certainty Asclepius (Amelung). Circa 150 AD. From Arndt-Amelung, Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiker Skulpturen, Munich, 1893 to 1925.

52.

Asclepius and Telesphorus at the Borghese Museum, Rome. Type II copy. Telesphorus's head is not ancient. Early 2nd century AD. Photograph by Anderson, Rome.

53.

Telesphorus. An example of the standard figure. Munich, Glyptothek. 2nd century AD.
M. Fuchs, Glyptothek München, Skulpturen, vol. VI, 1992, p. 177.

54.

The centaur Chiron: the typical archaic depiction with a fir tree and hunting booty. Attic amphora, Munich. Circa 520 BC. From Furtwängler-Reichhold, Griechische vasenmalerei, text volume III, Munich, 1932.

55.

Cult statue of Asclepius at Pergamon, flanked by two young centaurs. A work by Pyromachus, depicted on a medallion of Commodus (180–192 AD). In the Roman copy, an attempt was made to identify the head of the statue, which concludes the series of our illustrations (57). From Abh. d. kgl. Akad. d. Wiss. in Berlin a. d. j. 1845, reproduced in Berlin, 1847.

56.

Asclepius mounted on a winged serpent, like a dazzling solar deity emerging from the darkness. Based on a medallion of Alexander Severus (222–235 AD) from Nicaea in Asia Minor. From Abh. d. Kgl. Akad. d. Wiss. in Berlin, 1845, reproduced in Berlin, 1847.

57.

Head of Asclepius from the Baths of Caracalla, in the Museo Nazionale delle Terme in Rome. It was once believed to be a copy of the head of Pyrrhomachus of Pergamon. Today this is a doubtful assumption. Here Asclepius wears a characteristic crown, which is missing from the medallion of Commodus, fig. 55: in a sense, a late compendium of the major characteristic features of the bearded Asclepius's face. 2nd century AD. Photograph by Anderson, Rome.

II. HERMES, THE CONDUCTOR OF SOULS

THE MYTHOLOGEM OF THE ORIGIN OF MALE LIFE

PART 1: HERMES IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

1. THE QUESTIONABLE ASPECTS OF THE ‘HERMES’ CONCEPT

‘What did Hermes represent for the Greeks?’: this is the question, put in the simplest terms, to which we wish to provide an answer. And we do not pose it with the aim of obtaining the simplest and quickest answer:
‘A god’, since for most people this might mean nothing at all or, conversely, might express something that is highly questionable. In our approach, we merely assume that the name ‘Hermes’ did indeed correspond to something – a reality, albeit a spiritual one, and one that may have had a broader scope. Thus, our question does not become ahistorical, nor is it merely a question of a historical nature. But it must be recognised as a historical fact that for the Greeks their god Hermes did not represent mere nothingness, as he would for the contemporary man, nor was he a figure devoid of power, but rather a very specific ‘something’ and, from Homer onwards at least, he already possessed a very distinct personality. Nevertheless, as a human being, he never acted with the arbitrariness of a powerful being, but rather distinguished himself by his own understanding, which was forever determined. As historians, we must conceive of this Hermes in his entirety, as an unresolved and highly particular Whole. However, when we attempt to rediscover that reality of the Greek name Hermes in the realm of timeless realities unconditioned by history, we transcend the realm of historical questions. For space and time determine the epiphanies of the gods in the formalities of their representation, and yet no divinity is fully captured by the colour of the skin, the headdress or the garments and other attributes. The ‘something’ we are seeking is precisely this ‘difference’. To find it, we must possess, in addition to adherence to the authentic achievements of historical research – which we take for granted – a scientific understanding of high mythology.

The second question: ‘How exactly could this have appeared to the Greeks as a god?’, even though it is closely related to the first (‘What did Hermes represent to the Greeks?’), need not concern us for the moment. It is not a matter of, upon believing one has discovered

certain base traits and a lack of spirituality in the ‘primordial’ Hermes, but rather to raise it later and with even greater conviction. It is precisely this omission that renders most hypotheses regarding the origin mere unscientific conjecture. Nevertheless, we must not assume in advance that this ‘something’ must necessarily fulfil the requirements of sublimity which, according to our conception—in the interpretation of the new concept of the Greek gods—is inherent in the idea of the Hellenic god. Otherwise, we might end up like that great scholar of Greek religion, who, in the most brilliant pages he wrote, describes Hermes as a deity—an idea that seems obvious to us, yet at the same time distances him from the original characteristics of his figure—characteristics which the Greeks themselves never perceived as incompatible with his divinity.1

‘Whatever people may have thought of Hermes in ancient times,’ we read in the conclusion of that outstanding description of Hermes, ‘a dazzling flash must once have struck his eyes from the depths, for in the god he saw a world, and the god in the whole world. This is the origin of the figure of Hermes, the one known to Homer and preserved until later times.” At some point, a world of Hermes must have been illuminated for the Greeks – perhaps in that period of splendour, whose greatest and also final expression is the Homeric epic – a contiguous realm and domain which, though encompassing other spheres scattered throughout the entire world, nevertheless form a Whole in themselves, precisely ‘the realm whose divine figure is Hermes’. This realm is characterised and held together by a singular logic: ‘It is a world in the most absolute sense, a complete world, and not just any fragment in the sum total of existence, of that existence which Hermes animates and dominates. All things belong to it, yet they appear in a light different from that of the realms of the other gods. Whatever happens seems to originate in the heavens and entails no obligations; everything that is done is a matter of virtuosity and represents pleasure free from responsibility. He who demands this world of successes and favours from his god Hermes cannot refuse to lose, for the one does not exist without the other.” Thus, Hermes is ‘the spirit of the constituent elements of existence: he always reappears, even under the most diverse conditions; he knows both benefit and dissipation; he can rejoice in goodness and at the same time in the misfortune of others. Although much of what is set out here may,

‘Although it may be morally questionable, it is a way of being which, for all its problems, belongs to one of the fundamental aspects of existential reality; and for that reason—as the Greeks believed—it demands respect: not for all its specific manifestations, but for the entirety of its essence and its being.’

If ever a ‘fundamental figure of existential reality’ were to shine as brightly as the world of Hermes, it would not only be characterised and held together by its own specific logic, but would become evident precisely through that logic, and through it would also become convincing to us. However, what was understood in such an immediate way was certainly at a distance from those more primordial and less resplendent images of Hermes that can be seen atop the pilasters, on the square and phallic herms of most of the statues dedicated to Priapus, without our now referring expressly to the titanic and phantasmagorical features of this deity. Moreover, we may in fact refer to the figure of Hermes as that of a ‘way of being’, which at the same time represents an ‘idea’, and on this basis enumerate the profound truths of the god. His mode of being – if we continue to refer to the classical description already mentioned – ‘is so singular and pronounced, such is his imperturbability when he returns once more to all his spheres of action, that seeing him just once is enough to leave no doubt as to his nature. In this, the unity between his mode of acting and the meaning of his figure is recognised at the same time. It matters little what he seeks to achieve or bring about; the same idea is always revealed, and this idea is Hermes.”

The accuracy of these words is as compelling as what we have referred to previously. But we must still ask ourselves whether, because of this fixation on an idea—which is also compelling to us and represents a way of living in the world—and just as the Greeks did before us, we too might attribute it to a deity, would this idea not exclude from the outset something important from the figure and world of Hermes, precisely something Greek that forms part of him in a historical and analogous way? Perhaps it does so in accordance with a meaning which, of course, must reveal itself to us as something new and also very ancient, which might be inferred from our historical and philosophical understanding. For we must not only be prepared to conceive of something comprehensible and immediate, but

also something strangely mysterious, provided we manage to rediscover the figure of the god in its entirety. There is no doubt that the figure of a Greek god can present itself to us in such an unintelligible and illogical way that we feel tempted to dedicate to him those famous lines used to define a human being:

I am no clever book,

I am a god with my contradictions.

2. HERMES IN THE ILIAD

Let us first examine what we have learnt about Hermes through Homeric poetry. If we were to claim that certain characteristics of the figure of Hermes were unknown to his author – those not mentioned in the Iliad and the Odyssey, nor in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes – we would undoubtedly be jumping to a hasty conclusion. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves what the reason might have been for omitting traits drawn from other sufficiently ancient sources. The reason why we learn more about Hermes in the Odyssey than in the Iliad, and even more in the Hymn than in the Odyssey itself, is quite evident: the world of Hermes is not as present in the heroic world of the Iliad as it is in the epic journey of the Odyssey, a world that becomes even more evident in the Hymn, not because it originated later than the two great epics, but because it features the god himself as the hero.

The world of the *Iliad* is therefore not the world of Hermes. The figure who dominates that world, and through whom it acquires its characteristic features, is Achilles; just as Odysseus dominates and defines the world of the *Odyssey*. The world of the Iliad is essentially determined by the peremptory brevity of the life assigned to its heroes. The unique and sovereign way of life is matched by an equally unique death, with the same code of obedience, irremediable and with a conclusive end. The daimon of destiny born with the hero – the Ker2 that is his own – matures and becomes his daimon of death, and the soul, the suffering aspect of that same daimon, lamenting, evades its destiny, abandoning manhood and youth for a lifeless and sombre state of death. Thus, there is no escape. Life is unique; it originates in accordance with inherent codes that correspond to the hero's own figure, and expires with his own death. It is not snatched away or seduced by a foreign daimon. The seducer who leads it to death lies within its own being: in Patroclus, in Hector, in Achilles, in all those who perish for their heroic valour. Hermes does not appear in the Iliad even once as a ravisher or guide of souls…

The reason is clear: his sphere of action lies outside that world, in which death—a definitive and exclusive opposite of life, and to some extent the preferred opposite of the hero himself and his heroic existence—forms its unchanging backdrop. That in such circumstances Hermes is not a guide of the soul does not necessarily imply his inability to be one, but rather that death itself, in Hermes's world, perhaps merely takes on a different guise. What we learn about Hermes through the Iliad, what transcends his own world, concerns the resources of life, the resolution of mortal conflicts, and hidden transgressions of laws and boundaries. Death can indeed be viewed through the contradictions of life as a consequence of fate and a necessary change. Whereas the most obvious resource available to life—its overflowing capacity to conceive and give birth, to fertilise and multiply—is rather an unpredictable consequence, a result of chance. And it is here that we find Hermes in the Iliad.

His favourite, Formante, owes her flocks to him (XIV, 490). He was the lover of Polimele, daughter of Philanthus, whom he visited in secret and by whom he fathered a son born of a virgin, Eudorus (XVI, 180 ff.). With such references to Hermes, in the heavy atmosphere of an Iliad brimming with fatalities, a warm air bursts forth, full of vitality, a bringer of offspring and lavish in its contribution to fertility. (Even the names Formante, Polimele and Eudoro allude to rich flocks and a joyful, bountiful opulence). Yet he is deliberately distanced from any heroic deed. Not because death is foreign to him. In the language of the epic, he is frequently called Argifontes rather than Hermes. A name that recalls a titanic feat: Hermes slew Argos, the many-eyed one, with a curved sword, similar to that with which Cronus mutilated the god of the sky, and to that used by Perseus to cut off Medusa's head.3 From the permanent epithet of Argifontes, διάκτορος, we know that related terms refer to the dead and to the wealth that belongs to them and with which they are associated.4 His designation ἀκάκητα alludes to a benevolent god of death (XVI, 185). Perhaps the most appropriate translation would be 'the painless one'. He does not even take part in the gods' disputes, which are devoid of tragedy.5 As a rival, instead of a god, he is significantly assigned a goddess: Leto, a mother goddess similar to his own daughter, Artemis. But he is too prudent to 'fight with the wives of

‘Zeus’. ‘[…] boast among the immortal gods,’ suggests Hermes, ‘that you have defeated me by the sheer force of your overwhelming power’ (XXI, 498 ff.). With these words he turns away from Leto, for glory means nothing to him.

In the Iliad, his skill lies in choosing only the least heroic solution. Nor does he act as a messenger of the gods—a role he normally fulfils—and any reference to this is glossed over.6 Empowered by his own mastery, he takes his place among the other gods: he is the greatest of thieves. He stole a chained Ares from his captivity (V, 390), and could also have stolen Hector’s corpse, held by Achilles, had all the gods agreed (XXIV, 24 ff.). Zeus favours a better solution which, however, falls to Hermes. The final, bittersweet Book, which unfolds entirely under the sign of Hermes, suddenly reveals his unfathomable indulgence in the heroic world of the Iliad. Zeus orders him to visit old Priam, who is already on his way to ask Achilles for the return of his son’s body. His role is not that of a messenger – here too, as throughout the Iliad, Zeus’s messenger is Iris – but that of a guide, πομπός. For it is Hermes who delights in mingling with others, μάλιοτά γε φίλτατον ἀνδρὶ ἑταιρίσσαι, in responding to what is said to him, and in going unnoticed (XXIV, 334 ff.). And so he behaves now: to flatter the old man, he takes the form of a youth and conducts himself as a thief would. With his help, they manage to steal the corpse from the avenging daimon, the relentless master of Achilles and the entire Greek camp. Achilles obeys Zeus and relents. But it was Hermes who, after lulling the gatekeepers to sleep, brought about the solution.

The youthful and handsome mentor, the obliging thief, clad in his miraculous golden shoes that carry him over land and sea, and the magic staff with which he lulls people to sleep and rouses them again – does he not possess all the characteristics and attributes of a seducer and deadly guide of souls, the gentle psychopomp of later monuments? The reason why the poet prevents him from appearing in this role has become clear to us through the world of the Iliad. And the world of the Odyssey confirms this, further highlighting this aspect of Hermes.

3. HERMES IN THE ODYSSEY

Let us review the final Book of the Odyssey. It begins with an epiphany of Hermes:7

Hermes Cilenus summoned the souls of the suitors. In his hands he held his beautiful golden staff, with which he captivates the eyes of mortals at will, and with which he also rouses those who slumber. With it he set them in motion and guided them, and their souls followed him. Just as in the depths of a dark cave bats flutter about amid shrill cries, when one of the flock breaks away from the rock, for they hang crammed together, so they marched in a throng amidst piercing shrieking. Hermes, the Benefactor, led them along the gloomy paths. They passed beyond the currents of the Ocean and the White Rock, they passed beyond the Gates of the Sun and the Land of Dreams, and it was not long before they reached the meadow of the asphodels, where the souls dwell, images of the departed.

The death of the suitors was not the sad, yet harmonious, conclusion to a heroic existence: their sumptuous feasts came to an abrupt and unexpected end with the vengeful return of the husband. Slaughtered like animals, they were judged by the standards of heroes, and proved as flawed in their spectacular death as they had been in their youthful lives. They fell with the hollow thud of hollow-bodied animals, as if their souls had been strangled from their bodies. Hermes then proceeded to summon their souls. The word ‘summon’, used by Voss in his translation, ἐξεϰαλεῖτο, could also mean ‘to evoke’ the spirits of the dead, those who remain in the grave or in the underworld. Hermes is here engaged in the task of conjuring the souls of the dead before they are buried, not to force them to return by violent means, but to lead them gently towards the meadows of the afterlife. In his hand he holds the staff that signifies his connection with a sense distinct from ‘lulling to sleep’, ὄμματα υέλγειν, and ‘awakening again’,

distinct from that given to it in the final canto of the Iliad. The same words retain their original meaning there, and speak only of sleeping and waking in the literal sense: here, however, the text speaks of dying, but not of an unequivocal and definitive death. Furthermore, 'waking again' has, in this context, a double meaning, and may refer to an emergence from death itself.

The staff that embodies these unique characteristics is beautiful and golden. It maintains the distance between the god and the gloomy flock of bat-like souls. Nevertheless, the rod, as Horace saw it, may seem terrifying from the perspective of the one being led somewhere, of the guided soul: quam virga semel horrida nigro compulerit Mercurius gregi (Carm. I, XXIV). But when the poet celebrates the god, the gold of the terrifying rod shines all the more brightly: 'tu pias laetis animas reponis sedibus virga que levem coerces aurea turbam' (Carm. I, X). Here we speak of happy souls who, moreover, will not be entirely deprived of light even in the underworld. In Homer, the attainable glimmer of sunlight belongs solely to the god and thus shows us the guide of souls, imbued with his divine essence and set against those insubstantial beings fluttering around him. The benevolent Hermes, brandishing the golden radiance of his staff, even appears on the rusty path of the spirits. Here too he is called ἀκάκητα, the Painless One, since he causes no pain to these wretched souls. His presence, on the contrary, mitigates the effect of Odysseus's fierce vengeance, just as in the Iliad, in the book where Hermes predominates, he tempers the cruelty of Achilles. The only major difference is that here he reveals his most benevolent and golden aspect in a world that is not merely the earthly one, but in that in which Odysseus himself is the hero and the symbol.

The Odyssey – its characteristics, even more so than those of the Iliad, prevent me from falling into repetition – is not the poem of heroic life that stands out for a singular death, in the form of a fatal and inevitable opposite pole, but rather the poem of life, a life permeated by death that is present everywhere. Now the polar opposites meet. The world of the Odyssey is the world of floating existence, permanently linked to death, a single fabric of right side and wrong side, composed of its own foregrounds and backgrounds, behind and beneath its abyssal jaws. Odysseus floats permanently above them. His existence is not the only one that floats

in the Odyssey. Between life and death floats Telemachus, the suitors float, and especially the expectant Penelope floats. But it is Odysseus, in the strictest sense, the man who floats above abysses and cavities.8

If we previously described the Odyssey as an epic journey, we should now reconsider this reality—so often experienced—of the 'journey' as from something very specific, and very distinct from the simple 'walk'. Odysseus is no wanderer. He is rather a traveller (even if he is so against his will), and not merely because he walks and moves about, but because of his existential circumstances. The wanderer, despite his progress, remains rooted to the ground, even if this ground is not strictly bounded. With every step he takes possession of a new patch of land, though this taking of possession is understood only as a state of mind. The horizon stretches out as he advances, and he himself constantly expands and broadens his hold on the earth. Nevertheless, he remains bound to the solid ground beneath his feet and even longs to connect with other humans. Wherever he arrives, at every home, he demands a sort of letter of naturalisation. He is, for the Greeks, the one who comes, κατὰ ἐξοχήν, the ἱκέτης. Yet his protector is not Hermes, but the god of the vaster horizon and the firmer ground: Zeus. The traveller's state, by contrast, is one of floating. To others, to those who are firmly rooted, and also to the traveller himself, he appears to be in a state of perpetual flight. Reality becomes volatile for everyone, including himself. All around him everything becomes ghostly and improbable, and he even regards himself as a spectre. As he moves forward, it seems as though he might merge, yet he would never do so within a human community that yearns to hold him back. His companions are mere travelling companions. They are not those he intends to take back to their homes, as Odysseus does with his companions, but those with whom he forms a bond, as is said of Hermes in the Iliad, μάλιοτά γε φίλτατον ἀνδρὶ ἑταιρίσσαι. With travelling companions, one engages in behaviour that provokes the most absolute nakedness, as if the traveller had cast aside all clothing or disguise. Do not those who embark on the nuptial adventure and yearn to free themselves from all ties to the community in which they grew up and felt rooted act with boundless frankness – like naked souls? Is not this journey, the act of leading the bride home, simultaneously a form of abduction that entails a 'secrecy'? Travelling is the ideal situation for love. The abysses, above which rises the 'ethereal' as a spectre, they may be the abysses of passionate love,

the islands and caves of Circe, of Calypso. Abysses in the sense of an absence of solid ground to tread upon, in which one can only continue to float between life and death.

The traveller feels at home when on the move; his home is the path itself, but not the path connecting two specific points on land, rather a world of its own. It is the ancient world of trails and that of the 'wet paths', the ὑγρὰ κέλευθα of the sea. Yet it represents even more the world of the genuine paths of the earth, which do not divide the landscape in a straight and ruthless line like the warlike Roman roads, but in a meandering way, creating undulating, irrational lines, at once fitted and emerging, which nevertheless lead everywhere. Being open in every sense is part of its essence. Nevertheless, the paths make up a world unto themselves, forming a realm amongst the other realms of the world, an intervening realm in which, from its state of volatility, one has access to everything. Hermes is the god of those who move with confidence in this world of paths, and it is here that the most visible aspect of his world is described. He is constantly on the move, the ἐνόδιος and ὅδιος, and is found on all paths. When he is motionless, he also appears to be in motion, and even if he remains seated, the floating one is easily recognised, as someone aptly remarked upon seeing his famous, Herculean bronze statue.9 His role as guide and mentor is frequently cited and praised. And the term ἄγγελος has also been used, at least since the time of the Odyssey, to designate the messenger of the gods.

If we were to reflect on the full significance of his role as a messenger, we would need to give it special attention. But it will suffice to mention Hecate, who opened the gates to the underworld, as well as the fact that Hermes was able to carry souls upwards: it was not for nothing that he was also known as Angelos. Iris was likewise linked to this goddess, as evidenced by her cult on the island of Hecate, near Delos. To the essence of Iris, however, belongs an unattainable sign from the heavens: that of the rainbow, whose name she bears. Thus, in the world of the Iliad, she appears as a messenger of the gods. 'Message', Ἀγγελία – according to Pindar, a daughter of Hermes – is most frequently sent by the gods when the boundaries between life and death, fleeting time and eternity, earth and Olympus, are opened; boundaries that open easily when they present themselves with such volatility as in the

world of the Odyssey. Thus we discover how the gods sent Hermes in vain with a warning for Aegisthus (I, 38). And we see how she hastens to Calypso with Zeus's command, with her miraculous sandals and her magic staff (V, 44 ff.):

Descending to Pieria, he plunged from the ether into the sea. He then glided over the waves like a seagull hunting for fish in the vast expanses of the barren sea, his swift wings drenched in the salty spray. Just like this, Hermes travelled over the countless waves.

The ease with which he appears here as a messenger of the gods and, in the final book, as a guide to the souls of the dead, is evident in another characteristic scene from the Odyssey, on the island of Circe, where he acts as a skilled sorcerer who saves the hero. With the same ease, he meets Odysseus there, who is not surprised when Hermes extends his hand, speaks to him and presents him with the healing herbs to counter Circe's magic potion (X, 277 ff.). The more the atmosphere of the Odyssey is thick with spectral possibilities, the less surprising Hermes's presence becomes. But Odysseus himself, floating amidst this atmosphere, has yet another very particular connection with Hermes: although scarcely mentioned in the Odyssey, he is his descendant on his mother's side. In contrast, his grandfather Autolycus is mentioned more frequently; he is also spoken of in the Iliad as the thief of thieves in the heroic age and as the son of Hermes, who was worthy of his father even in the art of swearing an oath (XIX, 395) and whom he honoured most particularly. Odysseus told his faithful Eumaios, the swineherd, however, that if his deeds were accompanied by 'grace and fame', χάρις καὶ κῦδος (XV, 320), all men owed it to this god, including those who, like him, were mere servants. There can be no doubt, however, that the great talent of those who were cunning belonged to the line of Hermes-Autolicos, even if they no longer enjoyed the same original mythological stature that these possessed. Odysseus alone is the πολύτροπος, 'the resourceful one', and Autolikos, according to one source, even possessed the gift of transformation, whilst another claimed that whatever he touched became invisible.10 The 'art of swearing an oath', in its original mythological dimension, is shown to us in the Hymn to Hermes.

4. HERMES OF THE HYMN

The poet of the Hymn to Hermes is the bearer of the original mythological material, in such a way that it came to be regarded as a classical tradition. The cheerful, mischievous and versatile irony with which the titanic event radiates suits his hero well. And we can enhance our understanding of Hermes, not in terms of the development of his image with new aspects, but rather – and despite the way Homer presents him – in the deepening of the titanic. Classified as belonging to the world of Zeus, even though Hermes is not part of the Titanic lineage, we perceive in him at every moment the primordial pre-Olympian being. When the childhood of the gods corresponds not to Olympian mythology but to a much more primordial one,11 his appearances are those of a divine child. The primordial child becomes Olympian in the Hymn and, in this way, his pre-Olympian essence is integrated into his classical figure. In fact, we ought to consider the poem in its entirety, but I think that an interpretation of the most important parts may suffice.12

Sing, Muse, of Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia, of

Cilyne, the sovereign, and of Arcadia, rich in flocks,

messenger of the immortals, of the blessed gods…

Let us immediately highlight two affinities of the celebrated Hermes. The first is situated in a Greek landscape where he was venerated in a very special way, Arcadia, the mountain where his place of worship was located: Cyllene. The myth, associated with him from his birth, fits in easily, even though as a mythological motif of the primordial child it is certainly older than the divine Olympian order. The second connection lies precisely with the Olympians. Hermes, in his capacity as messenger, is one of them, and it is through this attribute that he receives his Homeric epithet ἐριούνιος, erroneously translated as ‘he who administers the blessing’. The

A comparison with a gloss13 from Arcadia gives it meaning and would fit very well with a god of death: ‘the swift one’. Indeed, on one occasion two chthonic deities will receive human sacrifices, known as14 ἐριούνιοι, and Aristophanes expressly confirms this as ’Εριούνιος ‘Ερμῆς of the χθόνιος. The basic notion of meaning – ‘as swift as death’ – fits his role as a messenger, in which Hermes is not only Arcadian and Cretan, but also Olympian. However, these two extremes – the cult in nature and the Olympian destiny – do not define him as an emergent being, but as one who ‘is to come into being’. What, then, is the becoming of the becoming of a god who reveals himself to a Greek poet?

Who gave birth to Maya,

the nymph of beautiful braids, united in love with Zeus,

venerable; she shunned the company of the blessed gods

and dwelt in a shady grotto, where Cronus

united with the nymph of beautiful tresses under the cover of night,

whilst sweet sleep overcame Hera of white arms: it remained hidden

from the immortal gods and mortal men.

Compared to the goddesses who dwell in the luminous heights of Olympus, she is nothing more than a nymph: a goddess closely associated with the Arcadian landscape, probably of the type originating from the mother goddess or primordial daughter.15 She is sometimes called Maya (a term used to distinguish older women, grandmothers and wet nurses), and sometimes takes the name Μαιάς, that is, ‘the daughter of Maya’. Atlas, the reckless Titan—who, according to Hesiod, is her father—and her connection to the heavens—as the eldest of the Pleiades—reveal her Titaness. In the Hymn she is given the epithet αἰδοίη, which we might translate as ‘venerable’, a term used to describe the original Titan gods in Hesiod, the θεῶν γένος αἰδοῖον. She did not
‘escaped the joyful gatherings with the gods’, but rather ‘avoided’ them –

To put it more precisely, ἠλεύατο – and she took up residence in a cave, ἄντρον ναίονσα. There Zeus fathered Hermes with her. A stolen love affair, yet all the more fully enjoyed, μιογέσκετο,16 the dead of night, νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶι, sleep as an accomplice to deceive Hera (as an aid in the Διὸς ἀπάτη of the Iliad to deceive Zeus) and, fundamentally, secrecy, λήθων: this constitutes the first moment in the becoming of Hermes. Thus is fulfilled not only a 'desire' of Zeus, as expressed in the translation, but, through what has been achieved, his 'understanding' is vindicated, Διὸς νόος ἐξετελεῖτο.17 This is, in that becoming, the second moment:

But when the great Zeus's plan was about to be

fulfilled, the tenth moon in the sky awaited it;

Zeus brought it into the light and remarkable events took place.

This unfolding is, therefore, a way of presenting oneself: εἷς τε φόως ἄγαγεν, ἀρίσημά τε ἔργα τέτυκο – that is to say, a gradual progression. Firstly, it manifests itself in the confluence – it would be more accurate to say 'in the constellation' – of those elements of this very same begotten god, who is already Hermes and possesses his characteristic traits:

Who then gave birth to a son rich in stratagems, of subtle wit, a

plunderer, a cattle-stealer, an inspirer of dreams,

Hermes, watchman of the night, sentinel of the gates…

Let us examine these traits. The Painless One is missing; the epithet ἀκάκητα does not appear even once in the entire Hymn. Here Hermes is only 'the leader of dreams', ἡγήτωρ ὀνείρων, and not 'the guide of souls'. The fragment from Homer, in which the dreamlike people of the Phaeacians – a people of drivers,18 like Hermes, worthy of the world of the Odyssey – offer Hermes a sacrifice before going to bed (VII, 138), perhaps could be

compared; but in the final Canto, with the epiphany of the psychopomp, it shifts once more to a kind of otherworldly distance. Here too, any tolerance on the part of the Phaeacians seems to be lacking, and we must rather think of deception through some ambiguous dream.19 All the other names point to this. Firstly: πολύτροπος (in the translation: 'the cunning one'), the well-known epithet of Odysseus. Nor does πυληδόκος ultimately mean 'the gatekeeper', but rather the dangerous 'night watchman', νυκτὸς ὀπωπητῆρα, who lies in wait for his unsuspecting victim by the gateway to the dark street.20 Before us stands the consummate highwayman and thief, and certainly also a flattering swindler. Before taking the next step in his introduction, we are first prepared:

That he was soon to accomplish glorious deeds amongst the immortal gods.

The subsequent revelations are thus followed by the events which the poet summarises with the first, the birth, in a trilogy defined by time, which in turn incorporates the fourth, as a foundation likewise fixed in time.

At dawn he was born; at midday he played the zither

and in the afternoon he stole the cows of Apollo, the far-shooting one,

on the fourth day of the month, the day on which the august Maya gave birth to him.

Hermes's association with infinity cannot in any way be attributed to our poet, since it is at least as old as the Hymn, and probably much older still. A specific reason was needed to fix the dates of the gods' births in the cult. Thus, for example, the fourth day of the month was not only very sacred to Hermes, but also to Aphrodite, who in various respects was closely linked to him.21 And the firm connection with the number four is confirmed by the fact that in Argos the fourth month was called Hermaios.22 The quadratic formed part of the

the most distinctive features of the figure of Hermes for the ancients, who also recognised him in the square form of the Hermas. Martianus Capella, a later author, summarised the general view (VII, 734): ‘the square number is attributed to Cyllenus himself, for he alone was regarded as the square god’. Whether the square figure or the fourth day of creation came first is irrelevant. It is a cardinal number, a way of presenting the divine whole, which the poet has linked here, as in a game, with the triad – which is no stranger to Hermes either –: he is depicted ‘with three heads’,23 and in the hymn his staff is ‘golden and has three leaves’ (529). In this interplay, however, birth coincides and merges with the morning, and it is no coincidence that the clear harmony of the lyre resounds at midday: the divine instrument, according to Pindar, is played by the very ray of the sun, and, just as the sun does with its light, its tones generate order. There is no need to emphasise that the darker aspect of Hermes appears with the night. ‘He who is manifesting himself’ does so in the easiest and most natural way, united with the countenance of the cosmos as it lights up and darkens again. But can he be discerned only from there? Are we merely facing the world, with the poet, on the day of Hermes’ birth – the ‘first tetrad’, τετράδι τῇι προτέρηι – or do we participate in the becoming that only the world of Hermes achieves, in the reordering of the world into a single cosmos of Hermes, to which he alone confers his countenance? The answer leaves no room for doubt. The act of revealing itself proceeds in the form of impulses, as if from the inside out:

So he leapt from his mother’s immortal womb,

remained prostrate in his sacred cradle but a short

while, and, rising to his feet, sought Apollo’s cows,

the threshold beyond which lay his lofty grotto.

There is literally mention of a leap, ὅγ᾽ ἀναίξας. With it begins the ‘overflow’ in the original text, which instantly becomes a further manifestation of the essence of Hermes:

There, a tortoise, discovering, conceived immense joy. It was

Hermes, indeed, who first made a tortoise a singer,

which came out to meet him at the door of his dwelling;

feeding on flowery grass in front of her home.

Finding and discovering are manifestations of the essence of Hermes. That the poet is so keenly aware of this is evident from the name he gives to the discovery: μυρίος ὄλβος. This is expressly stated in the sphere of Hermes: 'ὄλβος and wealth' are, according to line 524, consequences of Hermes' staff. Also ὄλβος, which here is even
'innumerable' μυρίος, signifies wealth, but even more so in the sense of true and stable happiness. Hermes's relationship with happiness and wealth, as is well known throughout the tradition, now begins to reveal itself in its unique form. According to the Iliad, he bestows wealth through fertility (and this also concerns, as has already been noted, the broader realm of chance); in the Odyssey he is addressed as the 'bringer of goods', linking him in such a way that the other gods are also called by this name (VIII, 335, 325). The hermetic gain reveals its nature as a find and a theft only in the Hymn.

A discovery born of chance is, in itself, not yet hermetic; it is merely the raw material for working hermetically, from which the spirit of the god unfolds. Chance, as a vestige of the chaotic primordial state, remains in the entire primordial cosmos,24 as well as in the Hermetic. Hermes has appropriated his own, and through it, every discovery—which in itself is divine and not a human possession—represents a theft for a better purpose. A Greek word defines the fortunate find: ἐρμαῖον, which belongs precisely to Hermes. This name was also given to the sacrifice performed on the roads beside the herms, a fortunate find for hungry travellers who – in spirit – steal it from the god. From this, according to the ancient explanation,25 arose the more generalised significance. Hermes accepts the appropriation of what has been stolen when it forms part of his domain. Consequently, the thief also appropriates the spoils in the sense of Hermes, as if it were a find. And when two people

When they undertake a joint venture, they call themselves Κοινὸς Ἑρμῆς, which means more ‘joint theft’ than ‘joint discovery’, and which, perhaps, would be more accurately described as ‘joint discovery and theft’. This is, in essence, the motto of every commercial enterprise. Even the most honourable one establishes in no man’s land a hermetic intermediate realm, between the boundaries set by property, where ‘finding’ and ‘stealing’ still occur. A mere lack of scruples, on the other hand, is of course not hermetic: it requires spirit and life experience. When the fool is lucky, it is because his luck comes from Heracles, the poor in spirit, venerated as the god of luck in Italy. He becomes dives amico Hercule. In the delightful little mythological tale to which Horace alludes (Sat. II, 6, 10 ff.), his commentator Porphyry explains it to us. One day Mercury allowed himself to be persuaded by Hercules to enrich a human who was a fool. He showed him a treasure with which he could buy the land on which he worked. So he did, and the hermetic discovery proved worthless, for he continued to work on the same field.

In the Hymn, we witness how, by pure chance – here, a primordial mythological creature,26 the tortoise – it becomes a work of hermetic art:

Wobbling, it moved its little legs. The swift son of Zeus,

seeing it, laughed and instantly spoke these winged words:

‘I have already received a most favourable omen; I shall not reject it.

Hail to you, fair-faced one, who accompany the chorus, friend of the feast, who

have come at a good hour; whence do you come, precious toy?

You bear a variegated shell, chelonian who dwells in the mountains.

But I shall catch you and take you home: you will be of some use to me

and I shall not fail to honour you (but you must first do me a

favour). It is better to be at home, for it is dangerous out here.

Yes, you shall be a defence against the pernicious spell

whilst you live, and if you were to die, then you would sing most beautifully.'

So she spoke; and after lifting it with both hands

he withdrew into the house, with his enchanting toy.

There, pricking her with a grey iron knife…

Now it is no longer the 'blessed' son of Zeus who laughs, speaks and acts here, but the 'swift as death': Διὸς ἐριούνιος υἱός. The irony of his words springs from his divinity and is as merciless as existence itself. It is grounded in 'seeing through'. Guessing intentions is a divine prerogative, and Greek tragedy offers its audience a divine perspective, imparting this way of seeing. Thus the disgraced fugitive can perceive the king, whilst the latter still rules and judges. In the same way, Hermes catches the tortoise. And there is no doubt as to what he sees in it: he refers to such an unsociable animal with an expression like 'feast companion', which, in the design decreed by the gods, alludes to the lyre.27 Whilst he is already gazing at the marvellous instrument, the poor tortoise is still alive; that beauty signifies a painful death for her. If the one who penetrates with his gaze is the god who knows this fate, then he treats with levity the irony of the situation that is visible only to him. It is a titanic cruelty, however, to mock during the performance28 that irony formulated by his words of penetrating visibility, and thus to aid fate in consummating the violent act. Hermes does not do so naively, but in a jocular and ruthless manner. The cruelty of his irony reaches its climax in the sly use of this proverbial line:

It is better to be at home, for it is dangerous out there.

However, the divine rogue is right once again, for through the death of his victim, he magically creates music: a unique way for mortals to transform the harshness of existence into fleeting indulgence.

‘Serenity and love and sweet dreams’ are the gifts, in the words of Apollo (449), of this hermetic art which he adopts as a manifestation of his own being. Originally it is for Hermes, and then endures in the form of the sounds of the siringa (512). Nor is this Apollonian music. Let us hear this song that Hermes played with the first sound of the lyre (52):

And once he had shaped it, holding his enchanting instrument with the
plectrum, he tested it, string by string, and it, at the touch of his hand,
resounded powerfully; the god accompanied it with his beautiful song,
improvising as he went, just as dashing young men at
festivals tease one another with jests.

Hermes’ song is no less playful than his words were: it bears comparison with the bold and ironic songs of the Greek youths’ alternating chants. If his words had previously been cruel and ironic, they are now boundlessly insolent. It is possible that, in the following, a line is missing after the first line,29 but the translation remains largely intact. Hermes refers to two themes when he sings: love affairs and wealth. The second relates to an aspect of himself we have already discussed, and the first reveals a trait that had hitherto been hidden: that of insolence.

Of Zeus, son of Cronus, and Maya, fair-shod, he sang, how
once they lived in loving union,
proclaiming his own renowned lineage.
He extolled the handmaids and the nymph’s illustrious
dwellings, and the tripods and cauldrons that the house
possessed in abundance.

Hermes recounts – as had already been anticipated – his parents' amorous affairs in a rather uninhibited manner. Yet this should by no means be interpreted as if it were commonplace or customary among the Greeks. The Homeric style, characteristic of the Hymn as a whole, is very restrained in its erotic content, though of course it is not prudish either. Simply put, if a romantic event occurs, and it is of some significance, it is explained when and where it took place. It is never given much space. The only exception is the Phaeacian singer Demodocus, with his song to Aphrodite and Ares, the surprised couple in love. This is fitting for the Phaeacian setting, which, in the hermetic world of the Odyssey, corresponded to the gentler aspect of Hermes. And there too, for the first time in the classical tradition, the insolence of this god is revealed. In Demodocus' song, he appears alongside the other gods, summoned by the deceived Hephaestus to bear witness to his own disgrace at the sight of the beautiful couple caught in the net. Asking his brother Apollo whether he would like to share the bed with the goddess thus captive, Hermes provokes the laughter of most of the Olympians (VIII, 339) by revealing:

'Would that this might come to pass, O sovereign archer

Apollo, and bonds three times more unbreakable held us fast,

and you gods and all the goddesses might see it,

whilst I lay beside golden Aphrodite!

There is no need to emphasise that discovery and theft, here too, in the realm of love, are inextricably linked:30 a secret love was the first element in the god's becoming. It was a stolen love, connected with Hera, a love of a transactional nature—in the broadest double sense of the word—that concerned Zeus and the nymph. The original text expressly speaks of a

'courtesan's love', ἑταιρείη φιλότης. It could also be a selfless love, of course, caught on the fly by the spirit of Hermes.

Would it be utterly impertinent to ask whether there might not be

a connection between this romantic relationship and Maya's treasures, she who, in the words of Hermes (167 ff.), feels no interest in opulence?

The Hermetic element, now brought to light in the Hymn through the discovery-and-theft and the possible trafficking, seems at first glance to be merely negative: precisely the negative aspect of the phallic herms, the 'shamelessness'. This sort of audacity indeed reaches its zenith in the verse referring to the love affair of his own parents. However, the negative also contains something very decisive of a positive nature. Undoubtedly the essentially phallic nature of the god in the herma. And on this, on that which is essentially phallic, we await an answer in the Hymn. Nevertheless, its mode of expression is as restrained as that of the Homeric epic. Just how far removed it is from any prudishness is shown to us when the little rascal behaves so indecently towards Apollo, in the scene of lines 293–298. Here there is mention of Zeus's 'ὀαρίζειν' and of Maya 'in ἑταιρείη φιλότης'. The first word refers primarily to amorous babbling, which is later used by Hermes (170) when explaining the gods' amusements on Olympus. However, it is a phallic word,[31] and also a literary delicacy in the style of the 'trova', used in the sense that the entire hymn of Hermes could be described as a highly literary monument to phallic shamelessness. This would be the answer, in this sense and in its entirety, to our question.

We must now, therefore, consider a particular form of discretion: the hymn does not share the frankness of the Hermas. Why? It is certainly not due to modesty or literary restraint. The former is non-existent, and the latter does not hinder the obscenity of line 296. The real reason has yet to be discovered. Here we need only pay attention to how the Hymn names the core and meaning of the brazen song. The line referring to the love of Zeus and Maya has been added to explain the subsequent development:

ἣν τ' αὐτοῦ γενεὴν ὀνομακλυτὸν ἐξονομάζων.

In the translation, ‘birth’ is used for γενεή; however, the meaning of this important word must be understood more precisely. The fundamental sense of ‘lineage’ or ‘family’ cannot be considered here, except in the most abstract—though equally real—sense of the heroic age: ‘origin’.32 For Hermes, too, it is important because of the place he occupies on Olympus. His brazen song is his γενεαλογία: ‘genealogy’ used in the sense of complementing mythology and even representing it. Mythology deals with origin and origins as the reason for all existence and for what is to come. Genealogy places the provenance of ancestors at the point of origin, as an emanation from the original foundations ‘with illustrious names’ (which the Hymn refers to as γενεὴν ὀνομακλυτόν, and conceives the great primordial mythological theme in the form of a family tree.33 The tree must undoubtedly begin with the original gods. This is the form of Hesiod’s Theogony. Another form is that of the Song, in which Hermes ‘indicates his praiseworthy origin’. His audacity reveals itself as a conscious return of the emerging being to its origin. It is the knowledge of one’s own origin and of one’s own reason, an unwavering awareness in a straight line towards unfolding, in which it is revealed to us as another trait of the figure of the god who manifests himself before us.

The precision with which this awareness is to be understood is clarified for us in the second Song to Hermes, with which he amazes Apollo. Let us listen to it at once, even though it does not appear in the Hymn until much later (427):

Celebrating the immortal gods and the dark earth, how they

were born in the beginning and what lot each received.

To Mnemosyne, the first among the gods, he sang in praise, the mother

of the Muses, for to her fell the lot of Maya’s son; according to their

rank and according to how each had been born,

she celebrated the immortal gods, the illustrious son of Zeus,

telling all in order, with the lyre resting on his arm.

Here, Hermes presents a complete theogony. Hesiod begins his own with a hymn dedicated to the Muses. It is natural for a god to turn to the source, to the mother of the Muses: the great goddess Mnemosyne, one of Zeus's wives, can also, from another perspective, be likened to a spring. (It is no coincidence that she possesses one near Lebadeia, and it is no coincidence that her daughters are figures resembling the goddesses of springs).34 She, as the cosmic essence of remembrance, is the memory which, like an eternal spring, never runs dry. She bestows, precisely through the Muses, the capacity for beneficial forgetting (Theogony, 55). In this way one does not lose oneself, but only that which must be forgotten. For this reason Mnemosyne favours the dead and the poets with her mercy: she does not allow the former to be exhausted, and she authorises the latter to overflow. Now she appears as the goddess who, like a daimon of fate, takes precedence over Hermes. This is what the original text represents here: ἡ γὰρ λάχε Μαιάδος υἱόν. For Hermes it has been a fatal determination; neither for him nor with him does the capacity for forgetting exist. He will never be able to evade the memory, which has him trapped, and carries him along as the innate knowledge of all that is original. Thus his awareness is revealed to us in the most precise manner: in its spiritual content, where just a moment ago we thought we could recognise the phallic.

There is no need to reveal either of these insights. The titanic, which may also contain the phallic,[35] emerges with such force as soon as the lyre falls silent for the first time (62):

Thus, whilst he was telling this, he was plotting other things in his

heart. And he carried her and laid her in her sacred cradle,

the concave lyre. But he, who desired flesh,

leapt, seeking a vantage point, out of the fragrant chamber, plotting

a daring deception in his heart, of the sort that men

who are thieves and plot in the hour of the dark night.

Even within the divine singer – in truth, a shameless titan – the thief was already nesting. The lust for flesh awoke within him: κρειῶν ἐρατίζων, say the words in the original text, uttered by a lion in the Iliad. With this, something non-Olympian, and therefore titanic, came to light, as subsequent developments show us. Instead of devouring the two animals, which he sacrifices once he has separated them from the rest of the stolen cattle, he skilfully and masterfully prepares (Odysseus, as a beggar, also possesses the skill of Hermes) the offering for the twelve gods (108–129). The bloody sacrifice is a titanic act, conceived in its simplest form by Prometheus, who, yielding to his animal nature, craved flesh.36 Hermes demonstrates his membership of the Olympians, as he is now counted among the twelve (their number is made complete precisely by his birth), participating in the sacrifice as the distant deities do, only symbolically, and without yielding to the craving for flesh (130):

Then the rite of the meats dazzled the glorious Hermes: for the

scent tormented him, even though he was immortal,

a pleasant scent; yet even so his valiant spirit was not swayed,

though he greatly desired to let them pass through his sacred

throat. But he left one in the high-ceilinged stable,

fat and flesh in abundance, and swiftly raised it aloft, a trophy

of the recent theft.

The theft must be viewed from the outset through a distinctly divine lens. This is not merely an entertaining account of the titanic mischief of a divine child prodigy, but rather a divine revelation of the essence and foundation. He is the νέη φωρή,37 not a ‘childish theft’, as the translation states, but ‘the new theft’ or ‘the new robbery’, precisely the

hermetic, which is only now being introduced into the world. Previously, there was nothing but violent, titanic theft. Hermes firmly suggests the possibility – as we shall hear – that he might also plunder the riches of Apollo at Delphi. Yet he consciously remains on the threshold of titanic violence, which would no longer be divine, without crossing it, though he would possess the strength, cunning and lack of scruples to do so. What prevents him, if not his divine nature, which transforms the titanic into something enchantingly artistic and causes him to lose his state of violence forever! The new form of theft or robbery is, indeed, the one Hermes revealed: the divine one. Apollo suffers no harm from it; he gains the lyre and a singular kinsman, a brother, albeit of an opposite sign. In place of violence, imagination and joy now appear. Everything happens in leaps and bursts (65: ἅλτο; 70: θέων) just as it had with Hermes' revelation, from the very moment of his birth, and just as his movements are throughout the Hymn (150: συμένως; 415: ἀνόρουσε θοῶς σπουδῇι ἰών; 320: ἐσσυμένως; 397: σπευδόντε; 505: ἐρρώσαντο). This suits this god (and, moreover, Apollo as well).38 Since, as a newborn, he does not yet possess his winged sandals, he crafts similar ones from tamarind and myrtle branches, not only to deceive his pursuers with the immense footprints, but also to harness the strength and speed provided by the myrtle,39 a plant with an explicit link to death. In this way he drives the cattle on, yet avoids the journey, ὁδοιπορίην ἀλεείνων.40 From the Odyssey he already knows the magical power of plants, and he also works miracles with the branches with which Apollo intends to bind him (410). His art is captivating – in every sense. The magician himself vanishes before our eyes as if he were a breath of wind. Thus he returns from his novel form of theft (146):

It drifted through the living room keyhole,

like an autumnal breeze, like mist.

In a straight line he reached the rich sanctuary of the grotto,

advancing softly with his feet; for he made no sound as he walked upon the ground.

The glorious Hermes hurried towards his cradle; he lay swaddled
in his nappy up to his shoulders, like a small child, his little hands
playing with the cloth that
covered his knees:
the adorable tortoise he held in his left hand.
To his mother, who was a goddess, though he himself was
a god, he did not deceive her; she addressed these words to
him:
‘What, you trickster, from whence do you come at this
hour of the night, clad in indecency? Now I think
that, indeed, soon, with heavy chains around your chest,
compelled by the son of Leto, you will pass through these
gates;
and I do not believe that, prowling about, you will in
future be a thief in the valleys.
Get out of here! Your father has sired in you a great source of
distress for mortal men and the immortal gods.”
To this Hermes replied with cunning words:
‘My mother, why do you frighten me in this way, as if I were a small child, who
knows very little of wickedness in his heart,
and who is easily frightened by his mother’s scolding?
As for me, I will devote myself to an art—the finest of all—

watching over you and me like a shepherd, forever.

And we shall not be content

with being the only ones among the immortal gods

who remain in this place without receiving either offerings or

supplications. Better it is to have daily dealings with the immortals,

being rich, opulent, with granaries full, better than sitting at home in this

dark cave. And as for my privileges, I too shall enjoy the same rites as

Apollo.

And if my father does not grant it to me, I will certainly

try (for I can) to be the leader of thieves.

And if Leto's most illustrious son should track me

down, I believe he will stumble upon something even

greater.

For I shall go to Pytho to dig a tunnel into his great

dwelling; from there I shall plunder his precious tripods,

the cauldrons

and the gold: I shall take away in abundance the gleaming iron

and the many garments; and you shall see it, if you so wish."

Thus they exchanged words,

the son of Zeus who bears the aegis and the venerable Maya.

The arrival of Apollo presents a new opportunity for Hermes to display his skills (235):

Thus, when he saw this son of Zeus and Maia, Apollo,
the far-shooting one, angered by his cows,
he sank into his fragrant swaddling clothes; just as the embers of the logs
are covered by the sparks of the wood;
so Hermes, upon seeing him who strikes from afar, tried to vanish.
In a brief moment he drew his head, hands and feet close
to his body like a child freshly bathed awaiting sweet
sleep,
yet in reality he was awake; he held the tortoise beneath his
armpit. The son of Zeus and Leto recognised them and did not
fail to see them,
the wild nymph, most beautiful, and her beloved
son, a small child, clothed in deceitful wiles.
After searching every corner of the vast dwelling, he
opened three chambers with the shining key, chambers
filled with nectar and delightful ambrosia; much gold
and silver lay stored within,
many of the nymph's purple and silver robes,
which the sacred abodes of the blessed gods hold within. Then, having inspected the corners of the vast dwelling, the son of Leto spoke these words to the glorious Hermes:
'O child, who lies in the cradle! Give me news of my cows,

in haste, for soon you and I shall come to blows. I shall seize you and cast you

into dark Tartarus,

into the ill-fated, inescapable darkness; and neither your

mother nor your father will bring you back to the light, but

underground you shall find your doom, leading a host of tiny

men."

The 'little people' – from the ὀλίγοι ἄνδρες, in an attempt to reproduce the original text –41 are probably the dead, who, with a 'soft humming', float there with a 'chirping', τετριγυῖαι, insubstantial, the 'image of those who in life are exhausted' from the Odyssey. It is the first time in the Hymn that this aspect of Hermes is alluded to. Apollo threatens to leave him exclusively in that dark realm of the underworld. There he may act as a guide to souls. For a moment the image of the psychopomp emerges, to grant the cunning psychagogue, the insolent seducer of souls, the primal image of all future rhetoricians and sophists: to make room for Hermes logos. Nor is 'the art of swearing' absent from the following speech by the original sophist (261):

'Son of Leto, why have you spoken these cruel words?

And have you come here in pursuit of your

wild cows? I did not see them, I did not hear

of them, I heard nothing from anyone;

I cannot account for it, nor can I win a prize for doing so.

And I am no cattle-stealer, no strong man;

nor is this my concern. Rather, other things matter to me: sleep matters to

me and my mother's milk,

having nappies draped over their shoulders and hot baths.

Let no one ever find out where this quarrel began!; and,
indeed, great astonishment among the immortals would be
if a newborn child were to cross the threshold
with the wild cows. This is what, against all logic, you declare. I was
born yesterday, my feet are tender, the ground is hard to walk upon.
And if you wish, by my father's head I will take a solemn oath: I promise that I,
for my part, am not to blame,
nor have I seen anyone else stealing your cows,
whichever cows they may be: I know of their fame only by
hearsay.' So he spoke, and defiantly his eyes flashed,
he wiggled his eyebrows, looking from side to side,
whistled loudly, and couldn't care less about what
he'd said.
To this man, smiling tenderly, Apollo, who works from afar, addressed himself:
'Friend, trickster, deceiver, I am quite certain that many
times, breaking into well-inhabited houses,
At night you will leave more than one man sitting on the ground
while you bring ruin upon the home without a sound, such things you say!
You will afflict many shepherds who dwell in the fields,
in the mountain passes, when, craving meat,
you go out to meet the herds of cows and flocks of sheep.

But, come now, do not cast aside the final, last

dream, companion of the low cradle, of the

dark night.

For indeed, this too in the future among the immortals as a reward you shall

have: leader of thieves you shall be called for all time.’

So he spoke, and taking the child, Phoebus Apollo carried him away.

With full intent, then, the mighty Argifonte

cast a portent, whilst his arms held him aloft: A reckless servant

of the belly, an insolent messenger.

He sneezed hastily after that, but Apollo heard it, and from his

hands he brought the glorious Hermes down to earth.

This final indecency places Hermes at the polar opposite[42] of Apollo, the mortally pure god, even though through his lyre he remains very close. How precisely the newborn can show us the full extent of the Hermetic world is unsurpassed. It brings to mind Horace, the bold author of epodes and a worthy poet of light and delicate odes, whose divine protector and model to follow was Mercury.[43] He describes him as esteemed in all spheres: superis deorum gratus et imis (Carm. I, 10). In the Hymn, all that remains is for the value of this vast realm of the world—in which even the lowest things remain sacred—to be recognised on Olympus, and for the boundary between the fraternal yet opposing spheres of Hermes and Apollo to be drawn in pursuit of reconciliation.

This recognition comes with Zeus’s laughter, when the newborn dares to repeat the contrived perjury in the presence of his father (368 ff.). Apollo also laughed at the thief’s first oath. It is that divine laughter which guarantees the harmlessness of the titanic legacy of the gods within their own circle.[44] With the reciprocal delimitation of their spheres, Apollo receives the lyre and Hermes obtains from him his calves and the symbol of shepherds, which here

is the staff, but the whip (497). By its form, then, this attribute will also be distinguished from the staff of Hermes that distributes wealth, the one known as ‘golden’ and ‘three-bladed’. Whether this designation refers to the caduceus, the herald’s staff so commonly depicted on monuments, remains highly doubtful. Hermes, for the time being, is merely depicted as a herald (331). We shall soon see the connection with which the Hymn alludes to Hermes’ role as messenger: the caduceus, the staff entwined by the two serpents, may well originate from the sphere mentioned there. Here it seems rather as though Apollo entrusted to his brother all the relations which he himself had hitherto exercised in a certain aspect of the chthonic realm: in his wealth of livestock and other treasures.45

In that case, the division of the nature of the oracle is highly significant. Apollo retains for himself the essential, that ‘which concerns the knowledge of Zeus’ (535), his ‘decree’ (538). Only he can thereby serve mankind, or harm them, if they deserve it for their unhealthy prying. He does not entrust such a lofty role to Hermes; on this crucial point he does not regard him as his equal, but as the ‘Eriunios, daimon of the gods’ (551). The ‘daimon’ is, though not in a pejorative sense, further removed than a deity as distinguished as Apollo when it comes to encountering and interacting with mortals. The great revealer of truth thus delivers a strange oracle to the swift daimon. There are three ‘honourable sisters’, whose names are not mentioned.46 Their description is an intentionally crafted enigma, as is customary in the language of oracles (553):

There are, it so happens, three venerable maidens,

sisters by birth, who boast of their swift wings; with

heads sprinkled with white pollen,

their dwelling is beneath the folds of Parnassus;

in their retreat they are masters of divination, which I practised

whilst tending the cows, when I was still a child:

my father cared not a whit.

From there, flitting about (here and there)

they feed on honeycombs and give their verdict on every matter.

When inspired by having eaten golden honey, they wish to

proclaim the truth benevolently.

But if they are deprived of the sweet food of the gods,

they lie, raising a clamour amongst themselves.

They are bees – this is the solution to the riddle. Bees represent virginal youth to the elders. 'They display swift fluttering,' as the original text states. Their 'little crowns' appear covered 'in the floury whiteness' of flower pollen. 'They provide the honeycomb' or, to put it more precisely, they gather the wax with which they will build their combs. They feast on honey. They flutter around the child prodigies to bestow upon them the gifts of the Muses.47 They are also endowed with spirit, for they are pure souls in antiquity.48 The bees, sated with the 'sweet food of the gods' – honey –49 are souls brimming with enthusiasm. The word 'flutter', θυίωσιν, refers precisely to the frenzied fluttering of the Maenad. The three sisters are enigmatic bees, but in their capacity as bees they are souls, whose ability or inability to prophesy depends on whether they are 'full' or 'empty'. The nature of the hermetic oracle thus depends on such conditions – which, conceived in a purely spiritual sense, we know only from Plato's Symposium.

Later classical tradition, however, knows nothing more on the subject. Hermes's connections with dice, the tombola and other oracles of chance are well known.50 But Hermes's role as ruler of the animals is generally less well known, as is the way in which Apollo now extends his brother's power even further over the herds (567 ff.). Apollo, curiously enough, concludes by referring to Hermes' role as a messenger, saying (572):

And let him alone be the messenger appointed by Hades,

who, though giving nothing, will bestow upon him a gift not small.

The kind of ‘messenger’ that Hermes can be ‘only for the house of Hades’ is revealed in the second verse: for this role as messenger he receives nothing (ἄδοτός περ ἐών) For who is going to bestow a gift upon a messenger whose priceless task is precisely this? ‘It is not the least of gifts’ (γέρας οὐκ ἐλάχιστον) is stated in the interpretation of the mysteries of death. Here the reference is undoubtedly to the psychopomp and his role. He is, in effect, a ‘messenger in the house of Hades’ through a consecration. The first line expresses this very clearly:

For he is an angel of Hades who has been perfected.

The word τετελεσμένος, however, means more than simply ‘the true one’. The phrase τετελεσμένον εἶναι is invariably preceded by τελεῖν – that is to say: ‘to perform an action’ – a circumstantial ‘to do this as well’. This
‘to do this as well’ amounts to a consecration, according to the Greek usage of the word, even if it is only meant figuratively. Thus, a military commander could also ‘be consecrated’.51 In such a case, the word would refer to a selection process. Hermes would therefore become a messenger and guide to Hades, according to this text, after having undergone a specific procedure. The full context would justify the idea of a consecration. It would be in keeping with the nature of the Greek mysteries that, through their consecrations, they formed friendly relations with Hades. (From this one might precisely deduce that death was not ‘a bad gift’ for the initiates). As regards the initiation of the female angel, Hecate, we may note that she received her consecration from the Cabiri, and from then on appears to have been associated with the house of Hades.52 Hermes maintained a most intimate relationship with the mysteries of the Cabiri. Here we are shown – or so it seems to us – something that goes beyond the classical tradition, extending to a mystical tradition at least as ancient. We are now at the end of the Hymn:

Thus did the sovereign Apollo love the son of Maya,

with boundless love; Cronus granted him his favour. He

accompanies all, mortals and immortals alike;

he bestows few favours, and on countless occasions he deceives,

in the midst of the dark night, the lineages of mortal men.

Only to the gods themselves are this god's deceptions not harmful. They are dispelled, like all things titanic, by the laughter of the Olympians. For humans, the situation is quite different, especially when they encounter the arts of Hermes in his most characteristic element: the night. It was night when he committed his first theft. It is true that the moon, to aid him, even rose twice and thus doubled the night.53 Apollo called him the 'accomplice of the dark nights' (290). After the theft, 'he lay down again in the cradle, to compare the dark night' (358), and see how the deep night formed part of the constellation of his becoming. It is therefore not without significance that the Hymn, which already on the day of his birth celebrated him as the most 'powerful spy'—in the sense of a dangerous adventurer—concludes with this dark aspect of the god.

5. HERMES AND THE NIGHT

The key texts of the classical tradition concerning Hermes lay before us. We need not cite those later passages that merely support or paraphrase this tradition. An example of this might be the account concerning an ode by Alcaeus to Hermes: of how the little cattle thief also steals the bow and quiver from his menacing brother.54 We are faced with a striking figure, whether he is depicted as a child, a youth or a man. We see, on the white-ground fragment belonging to a beautifully styled Attic funerary vase, how, with his serious, bearded face, he reaches out his hand to someone who is no longer anyone. In another of the marvellous drawings, we observe how the dead woman casts a deep gaze upon this fascinating guide of souls. His appearance has become more settled, even more sublime than in that image on the archaic vase, in which he advances impetuously with his curved sword raised to kill Argos, or in that other one, in which he is shown winged, seated with the magic staff – perhaps summoning the spirits of the dead to reveal themselves. Before us might lie an entire gallery of images of Hermes, including those spiritual epiphanies from the Attic funerary lekythoi. Thus, through the painting of 5th-century vessels, a fourth spiritual dimension is conquered, and in this way, only those fields of asphodels that form the vanishing, devouring backdrop of the benevolent yet inexorable psychopomp draw near: he himself had not become any less unsettling.

It is not merely a question of the identity of a name, but always of the same god. For the Greeks, he was as he is portrayed in classical tradition, to which the pictorial representations also belong. In
‘his way of being thus’ is a historical reality, which, in a serious and honest historical sense, cannot be attributed to anything else: to a concept, to some
‘force’, or some ‘spirit’ – whether the spirit of a funerary monument or a spirit that shows the way –55, or even an idea, which did not already contain within its essence all that distinguishes Hermes’s way of being. The splendid description quoted at the beginning, presented as the idea of Hermes, proved to be correct through the interpretation of the texts, but

not like that ‘everything’ which certainly represents the truth. The negative interpretation of the findings was incorrect. ‘In the new religion,’ as indicated in the Homeric classic,[56] ‘Hermes is not a god of procreation and fertility, although he is capable of appearing as such, for his marvellous way of acting can lead to the goal of loving union and the bearing of children’. ‘It is always a matter of the enchanting escort, which forms the essence of his actions, the guidance towards an exquisite benefit…’. “The power of procreation is never the essential aspect of Hermes.” This in itself is correct and positive: that the world of Hermes was under a “special sign, that is to say, under skilful guidance and the sudden attainment of a benefit”, does not precisely exhaust that world. This includes what has been denied: both the phallic and the spiritual, shamelessness as well as mercy and indulgence, however unclear and obscure the connection may seem to us. The phrase: ‘In the joy of companionship the true essence of the god is revealed’, as a limitation of the figure of Hermes, of his style, idea, manner of being or world, is not much better than attributing it to a hypostasis of a divine disposition for help and a diabolical delight in the misfortune of others embodied in a person.

What was the intention behind conceiving Hermes’s nature—as historically depicted in texts and artistic monuments—as a ‘world of Hermes’? Well, the diversity of what has been handed down does, in fact, appear to be the closest approximation. ‘World’ can be a broad concept, if considered as an autonomous whole that absorbs the observer, as if the latter were moving within a world that, moreover, encompasses them. Thus the world of the Iliad or that of the Odyssey welcomes us. However, each of these worlds is at the same time a developed idea of that world which, prior to this realisation, already existed, and which, to fulfil that idea, provided extensive illumination. There is no ‘world’—not even if it is the purely spiritual epiphany of a god who illuminates the idea—that is not contained within the world: it is precisely the appropriate form as ‘container of worlds’, precisely, with such content. If a god is ‘idea’ and is a ‘world’, it remains connected to that world which is the basis of all those ‘worlds’ alike, although only can be ‘aspect of the world’, whilst the world, whose aspect it represents, in turn possesses aspects of these ideas. For it too, as a whole, is capable of being illuminated as an idea; it possesses the illumination of the idea and, in its own right, is luminous and clear. There are words in which

that ancient and now forgotten wisdom of language surfaces, for example the Hungarian világ, ‘light’ and ‘world’, and the adjective derived from it: világos, ‘luminous’ and ‘clear’, which, according to a pure composition, could also mean ‘contained in the world’. ‘Luminous’ and ‘clear’ in the sense of ‘contained within the world’ – and therefore conclusive – could also be the idea of Hermes: only thus would it be a ‘basic figure of existential reality’. Concrete, and precisely for that reason, since it – as is always the case with reality – does not contain much evidence for us. Thus, the transmission would in effect correspond to a ‘world’ containing worlds, which perhaps as an idea might gradually become comprehensible to us, accustomed as we are to philosophical rather than mythological ideas…

One of the precursors of this ideal conception of the ancient gods, Goethe’s friend Karl Philipp Moritz,57 puts forward in his *Götterlehre*—precisely when discussing Mercury—the proposition that ‘in a certain sense, every divine figure encompasses the essence of things in themselves, taking them into account from every relevant perspective’. The author of the aforementioned classic treatise on Hermes, Walter F. Otto, is unwittingly his faithful successor, in that he consciously, and also from a relevant point of view, observes once again in the figures of the Greek gods the ‘essence of things’: precisely a realm of essence whose life-giving spirit – a spirit which, in a certain sense, is made of the same matter, a kind of spiritual confluence – appears with the corresponding divinity. Consequently, however relevant the perspective may be, it must also find its justification in the ‘worldly activity’ of the divine figures he has discerned. Thus, for Otto, Hermes is, on the one hand, ‘the spirit of a configuration of existence, which even under the most changing conditions always returns’, and on the other hand, however, he is also the absolutely concrete spirit of the ‘worldly’ aspect of the earth, which always welcomes us back as if it were a special world: ‘a spirit of the night’. Now all that remains is to ask: is this
Does this ‘mundane task’, which is performed throughout the night, truly embody the figure of Hermes as portrayed, and—insofar as this is not immediately apparent—render it convincing?

Nix, the primordial goddess of ‘night’, is of course not identical to Hermes, and Apollo sufficiently distinguishes his brother from her when he calls him ‘accomplice of the night’. Otto, however, rightly observes that we,

in many of the Greeks' references to the night, we too spontaneously think of Hermes, even though it is not a matter here of the tradition itself, but of that 'something' which belongs to him. Let us therefore read the most beautiful page Otto has written on the image of Hermes, precisely the one devoted to the experience of the night:

Anyone who finds themselves alone at night in the open countryside or walking through quiet streets perceives the world differently than they do by day. Proximity has vanished, and with it, distance. Everything is far away and, at the same time, close; right beside us and yet mysteriously distant. Space has lost its sense of scale. Something whispers and echoes; one cannot tell where or what it is. The feeling, too, is uncertain. Through the most loving mystery, one experiences a certain strangeness, and the terrifying excites and attracts. There is no longer any difference between the dead and the living; everything is animated and soulless, sleeping and awake at the same time. What the day brings closer step by step and makes recognisable suddenly emerges from the darkness. Like a miracle, the encounter appears suddenly; what is it that reveals itself, a magical bride, a monster or just any old tree trunk? All objects irritate the traveller, playing with familiar faces, and in a moment they know nothing of it. Suddenly they frighten with strange gestures, and again they are familiar and harmless.

Danger lurks everywhere. From the dark throat of the night that opens up before the traveller, an assailant, a hideous spectre or the restless spirit of a dead man may emerge at any moment and without warning; who knows what once happened in that place? Perhaps it is the will of nebulous, malicious spirits that leads him astray from the straight path into the wasteland where terror reigns and where seductive demons dance a circle that leaves no one alive. Who can protect him, guide him aright and advise him well?

The very spirit of the night, the genius of its goodness, its charm, its inventive ingenuity and its profound wisdom. She is the mother of all secrets. She covers the weary with sleep, takes away their worries and delights their souls with dreams. Her protection is enjoyed by the unhappy and the persecuted as much as by the cunning, to whom her ambiguous darkness provides a thousand inventions and skills.

She also casts her veil over lovers and protects with her darkness all their affections and all their charms, hidden and revealed. Music is the true language of her secrets, the enchanting voice that sounds when eyes are closed and in which heaven and earth, nearness and distance, man and nature, present and past are perfectly understood.

But the darkness of the night, which invites sweet sleep, also grants the spirit new focus and clarity. It makes it more knowledgeable, bold and daring. An intuition ignites or descends like a star, a rare, precious and even magical intuition.

Such is the night that can frighten and deceive the solitary soul, yet is at the same time their friend, helper and counsellor.

Is it not thus proven, we ask after having witnessed this experience, that the night is in a certain sense like the matter of Hermes, that which provides him with worldliness? So it is: once the god is known and brings his form with him, then the traits akin to the night are certainly recognised once more. However, not all the Hermetic traits are gathered there by any means. Some essential ones are still missing. Otto himself admits this, even if he deals with the essential here with a certain lightness. ‘With this image,’ he adds immediately to his description of the nocturnal experience, ‘the image of the god Hermes has not been captured exactly, but it contains something of all his traits. It only needs to be made more virile and daring, and we shall have a spirit akin to that of Hermes before us.’ It is precisely this more virile and daring aspect, active in essence, that ought to be toned down in our conception of Hermes, if we wish to recognise his worldliness in relation to the night. The passivity of the night and the active nature of the portrayal of the figure of Hermes separate these two worldly aspects of his being.

Is the world of the active and the reckless, which we rightly associate with Hermes, however, a world less nocturnal than that of the night itself? And is it not in fact there, in the realm of the world of men and animals – which in their ‘totality’ were attributed to Hermes – that becoming lies? Certainly there too there is ‘ceasing-to-become’: night in a very different sense, though equally hermetic – the night of dying –
is it not the one we carry within us? As an inseparable night, to which

Is it not a pleasure to be at one with the night, the night out there, like a ghostly sister of the vast, all-encompassing world?

In the night out there, it has not been possible to recognise the original thief or the bandit, nor even the psychopomp, or the insolent god of the Homeric Hymn. Nevertheless, together with the poet of the Hymn, we enter, in a certain way, into his becoming. We know his origin and that which endures in his conscious being. He is certainly the very same profound darkness from which we too come. Perhaps that is why Hermes floats before us so convincingly, guiding us along our paths, showing us treasures of gold in every stirring moment of the spirit of finding and stealing, because he derives his worldliness from us, or to put it better: he attains it through us, as water is drawn from a spring; and it can be stated even more precisely: through the spring that flows from depths far deeper still than those of the world.

We shall devote a second observation to the monuments and accounts that show Hermes to be closely linked to the origin of life and to immortality. In the classical tradition, his world reveals itself as rather skilful in its outward dealings. Despite thefts, deceptions and insolence – and this is probably the most marvellous thing about him – a divine innocence is his own. Hermes has nothing to do with sin or atonement.58 What he brings from the source of becoming is certainly this: the ‘innocence of becoming’.

PART 2: HERMES OF LIFE AND DEATH

1. HERMES AND EROS

The answer to the question: ‘What did Hermes represent for the Greeks?’, according to classical tradition, can be conceived as follows: the supra-individual source of a special worldly knowledge and conception. However, there also exists a worldly knowledge based on the fundamental assumption that man is alone in the world, endowed solely with a consciousness capable of receiving sensory impressions, which can be assessed exclusively through the natural sciences. Such an assumption does not apply to that other worldly knowledge, which corresponds to the ancient references to Hermes. This way of conceiving the world is open to the possibility of enjoying the company of an extrasensory guide, equally capable of providing the consciousness with impressions of a different kind: evident impressions that in no way contradict the observations and findings of the natural sciences, but which go beyond the worldly knowledge mentioned at the outset – that which is commonplace today. With Hermes as a guide in life – as classical tradition shows us – the world takes on a special aspect that we have come to know: the Hermetic. An aspect that is entirely real and remains within the realm of natural worldly knowledge. The totality of paths as a space of Hermetic possibilities; the fortuitous as Hermetic matter, its transfiguration through discovery and theft – the Hermetic event – as a Hermetic work of art, which always turns out to be somewhat dazzling: in fortune, love, poetry and all manner of solutions against the narrowness and limitations imposed by laws, circumstances and destinies. Were they merely realities of the soul? They are the world and they are a world: precisely the one that Hermes opens up to us.

The reality of Hermes’ world attests, at the very least, to the existence of a place from which it becomes apparent; moreover, it bears witness to something active that is not merely a representation of that place, but is always there to suddenly propel the world towards the creation of hermetic or dazzling works of art. The source of this worldly knowledge and conception is Hermes, who, upon hearing his name, unfolds with

clarity – just as it does without being named, although in that case it is less obvious. But it must encompass the full scope of Hermeticism: from the phallic – and whenever we reach this point we find that, if we attempt to make use of knowledge, we still do not know how to proceed, since, due to classical tradition, we are compelled to supplement it – to the guidance of souls, an activity that goes beyond living. Hermes has remained rigorously enigmatic on this point. Through him we perceive the world in the Hymn to Hermes. Had we not known it, we would have had to learn it there: knowledge of the world is very different if acquired with an ancient divinity or without one. Viewed from a mythological perspective, in every god lies the origin of a world, which without him remains invisible, but with him is revealed in its visibility beyond the concept of the world of the natural sciences. Thus, Hermes is also more than the mere luminous idea of a world. He is its origin, through which it was created and through which it becomes comprehensible. As the foundation of our understanding of the world, he is undoubtedly also an idea, even if we have not yet fully assimilated it. The adventurous nocturnal god, being there alone, appears in Greek mythology as unparalleled and as an outsider.

But what actually happened? ‘When Aphrodite was born – or so the well-known myth goes, more or less – the gods organised a feast, and among those present was the son of Metis, Poros (which, translated, would mean “the son of prudence” or “the way”). As soon as the meal was over, Penia (Poverty) appeared to beg for alms, since a banquet was taking place inside and she was outside, standing at the door. Then Poros, drunk on nectar—for there was no wine yet—went out to the garden of Zeus and lay down heavily to sleep. Penia, finding no solution (ἀπορία), devised the cunning plan of allowing Poros to father a child with her. She lay down beside him and conceived the daimon, whose story is precisely recounted to us. As the son of Poros and Penia, he finds himself in a fateful situation: on the one hand, he is always poor, rigid and rough; he goes barefoot and has no roof under which to shelter; he sleeps on the bare ground, without a blanket, in doorways and on the streets, always exposed to the elements. His condition is that of his mother, and thus he is forever bound to scarcity. On the other hand, however, he is well-disposed, like his father, towards beauty and wealth; he is virile, combative and tenacious; he is a skilled hunter and always devises some cunning plan; he is hungry for knowledge, and

knows how to attain it (πόριμος), and strives for wisdom throughout his life; he is a thousand times the artist, magician and sophist."

The mythological motif then speaks of states of abundance and emptiness, on which Hermetic prophecy, according to the Hymn, also depends. Those bees have become this daimon. 'Suddenly it flourishes and lives – so it is said of it – if it is well provided for by the abundance inherited from Poros ὅταν εὐπορήσηι; soon it dies and, yet, afterwards lives again in accordance with his father's nature, but that which is instilled in him through Poros τὸ ποριζόμενον, is permanently dissipated from him. Thus, Eros never lacks a way out οὔτε ἀπορεῖ and is never in full possession of wealth…'. And it is certainly superfluous to say that this concerns the great daimon of Plato's Symposium. It is Socrates who explains the myth. He had heard it from the wise priestess Diotima, of Arcadian Mantineia. What the source indicates is certainly not without foundation or meaning.59 To what extent the mythological motif cited, setting aside Plato's account, is based on an even older religious tradition will never be known with any certainty. For us, it is irrelevant to make such a distinction. Plato's spirit creates a genuine mythological motif. The method of characterising a divine being through his becoming, here and in the Hymn to Hermes, is the same. In both instances, we are dealing with realities conceived mythologically. It is the affinity between these realities—those of Poros and Eros, and that of Hermes—that concerns us.

If Eros is a reality – and it is for Plato, and surely for all those who have ever experienced it – then Poros is even more so, for it possesses all the positive characteristics of Eros. A figure for a more sustained, more substantial world, of a comprehensible cosmic breadth, as in Hesiod's genealogy of the gods; to use our earlier expression: the greater the elevation, the greater the substance in the world,60 and that is precisely what now happens to Poros. This is not an invention of Plato's to assign to Eros a father who conceptually holds a higher rank. A 7th-century lyric poet, Alkman, mentions him alongside Aisa, as one of the two most ancient deities γεραίτατοι σιῶν, against whom no heroism can stand (fr. 1, 13 ff.). The ancient glossator, moreover, notes that Poros, in Hesiod, is equivalent to Chaos. However, whilst this creature, the oldest in the Theogony, originally represents the deformed, without

With no direction or movement, reclaiming within itself all that has been shaped, Poros seems to be its name and its offspring on the path of the world's abundance, on the journey towards its free development, in perpetual progression, virile and active, ready to lie in wait, attack and overflow into all that signifies creativity and fertility. Aisa, classified and assigned as the primary feminine alongside him, can only represent the restriction and limitation in keeping with the destiny of each individual. Poros's boundless movement is also indicated by the heroism that confronts him ἀπέδιλος – probably 'without winged sandals'. 'No human flies towards the sky', we are then warned.

Eros thus resembles this father figure, who bears so many similarities to the adventurous god Hermes. And how does he relate to Hermes himself? He shares the same hermetic scope with him in many respects. On the one hand, he is a divine child, who in Thespiae had an archaic cult monument: a rough stone similar to phallic herms, although these already displayed a highly differentiated level.61 And on the other hand, Hesiod, the poet of Ascra, a neighbour of Thespiae, already described his resemblance to great love poetry. In the Theogony he appears with Gaia, immediately after Chaos, as the third, and brings with him activity and movement, as the driving force behind the development of offspring, something which the first primordial being lacks, whether that be male or female. Consequently, he is certainly the primary male in the cosmos, and he is also 'spiritual' when he 'unbinds the limbs' as if they were fainting and death. And he is no less swift than the infinitely swift Hermes: he arrives flying on his wings, and although Hesiod does not state this explicitly, this is indicated by the ancient mythological conception relating to Orphic cosmogony.62 But there is something about which Hesiod is already critical: 'To all gods and men he tames in the breast understanding and even the most sensible will' (Theogony 122). The restraint wrought by Eros flourishes even more with erotic profusion. And, according to Plato, it certainly brings the marvellous evocation of the splendour of the spirit's knowledge, but not the cold, calculating intelligence of Hermes. Far from being a blind passion,63 Eros does not represent any hermetic freedom in that floating, in which he even provides wings for the most disoriented souls. In him, even the most spiritual, such as the recollection of certain primal images, implies bonds. Determining in advance, being ordered through archetypal images—the very essence of idealism—are matters of Eros. This is the reason

which is why the love poems in their minds are so different from those of Horace, which were created under the sign of Hermes.64 Viewed from the world of hermetic possibilities, Eros, despite his more opulent nature, appears limited: an unruly son of Hermes, somewhat idealistic and somewhat foolish.

Thus, Eros almost seems to embody within himself – and for us this is, at the very least, a clue to understanding the concept of Hermes – the phallic, the spiritual and the psychic; in other words, he transcends the life of the individual. The traditions, according to which Eros is in fact a son of Hermes, thus take on special significance. They do not belong to the classical tradition, but rather gave rise to another alongside it, a more secret tradition. Cicero, who has preserved them for us in his works on the gods (De natura deorum III, 23, 60), invokes in the very same lengthy paragraph
'researchers of secret manuscripts': those who scrutinise the innermost and most hidden writings. And he examines the results of such research in detail, in a wholly external and systematic manner. The different variants of the myths are simply listed, distinguishing between gods who share the same name. According to this list, the first Eros was the son of Hermes and the first Artemis, the second Eros was the son of Hermes and the second Aphrodite: Cupido primus Mercurio et Diana prima natus dicitur, secundus Mercurio et Venere secunda.

Likewise, the question regarding a mystical tradition, mentioned at the end of the Hymn to Hermes, remains open and is still unanswered. And the secrecy of the Hymn, which had caught our attention when we compared it with the frankness of the Itifallic Hermas, remains unexplained. These are genuine problems that still need to be clarified, and behind which the secret of Hermes65 continues to call out to us. We now deal with fewer classical phenomena; we organise them and let them speak for themselves, just as classical tradition spoke for itself.

2. HERMES AND THE GODDESSES

Hermes, as a companion of the goddesses, is also well known in classical tradition. In the Odyssey, Eumaeus, who lives on the outskirts, in the woods, offers the nymphs and Hermes a portion of the pig's carcass (14, 435), thereby demonstrating the relationship that has existed since ancient times between these deities. The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite refers to this at greater length (257 ff.). The nymphs, who in the Odyssey are mentioned before Hermes, are, according to this version, neither immortal goddesses nor human women. Trees have grown alongside them, which have ultimately perished alongside their long-lived mistress. Not even the nymphs of the springs, according to the classical conception, live eternally.66 Nevertheless, all the more lavish are they with their gifts; they are the nurses to the divine children and demigods, they enjoy the 'immortal food of the gods' and dance with them in beautiful circles. It is with them – the Hymn to Aphrodite continues – 'with whom the Silenus and the skilful spy, he who slew Argos, frolic in the depths of evocative caves'. Here Hermes appears for the first time in the same company as the Silenus, those half-animal and essentially phallic creatures. But whilst the latter seem to exist merely as a masculine complement and fulfilment for those spirits of a feminine nature, Hermes presents himself in his relationship with the nymphs rather as if they did not embody for him the eternal feminine – which he is bound to serve – but rather 'opportunity', which he eternally masters.

However, this is merely one aspect of the relationship. In the cult of the nymphs, Hermes was specifically designated (CIA III, 196) as a faithful companion (συνοπάων) to the goddesses, as we know from, above all, the numerous votive reliefs found in the mountains and caves of Attica. The reliefs always depict a triad of them, the smaller choir, just as the Three Graces of the Acropolis of Athens were also depicted.67 In a way, we are led to those who advance with solemn steps, as if they were about to reveal a secret: that it is precisely these three who cause everything to spring forth, both in the depths of the caves, and in the springs, in the roots, and even in the mountains. On a

In this beautiful marble relief, the worshipper is also depicted, sculpted on a much smaller scale, to whom 'the sanctified secret revealed' of exuberant fertility is shown: its feminine nature, to which, nevertheless, the masculine also belongs.68 However much the classical conception may divide the feminine aspects of the world between springs and tides, caves and trees, through this triad we also glimpse the primordial figure of that great goddess, whom we know to be simultaneously a triune figure.69 If the original feminine was assigned to a tree and a nymph, so that both were to die when the tree fell, the great Demeter, the most maternal of the primordial feminine triad, also felt their pain. It is therefore not evident that there was a relationship between the great goddess and a nymph, nor that there was a classical link – as formulated by Callimachus, the Hellenic poet, in the language of feelings (Hymn 6, 40) – and yet, as the sacred groves of Demeter or Persephone demonstrate, it did endure alongside the classical concept. The revelation of the feminine in three distinct figures merely signifies that knowledge of the original core of a three-aspect goddess had generated expressive classical images. The triad, at the origin of that knowledge, was still one: a virginal creature – not virginal in the sense of human brides, but as springs and all primary waters are – who became the primordial mother and reappeared as a virginal bride in her daughter. The most secret traditions shed light on the relationship Hermes had with these primordial female creatures.

Hermes fathered Eros with the first Artemis, as Cicero explains, drawing on a mythological motif that has since been lost.70 According to another account, however, it was the second Aphrodite whom he made the mother of a second Eros. However, the two can be linked, together with other accounts of Hermes's liaisons with great goddesses, in a genuinely pre-Olympian mythological narrative. But here he is not transformed – as in the version we know through the hymn of the mythological motif of the Cilician birth – into a son of Zeus and thus integrated into the world of the Olympian order. He is a son of Uranus and Hemera, of the sky and the luminous day, who becomes aroused in a priapic manner upon catching sight of a goddess.71 Even if it is said that this scene took place in northern Greece (we shall soon learn the setting), in reality this mythologem could correspond to the text of the representations of the phallic Hermes, likewise of
'Cilician nature', which designated him as the phallus.72 But in no case

It must be understood that the entire story was invented solely to serve as an explanation for the cult monuments. That mythological motif addressed a fundamental mythological theme of the utmost importance: the primary stimulation of the purely masculine principle through the feminine.

Do we know, then, whether this originally mythological Hermes, of whom we speak here, was already an unambiguously male figure prior to this scene? The opposite seems more likely. Aphrodite, daughter of Uranus and Hemera, is mentioned as his sister, and this origin makes sense in her case. Her nature, derived from the celestial god, is likewise attested in Hesiod73 through another account of the birth in the style of primordial mythology. Her splendour is more closely linked to the luminous nature of Hemera and far less to the Hermes of the night. The original being of dual sex, known by the term hermaphrodite since Theophrastus, and who is attributed to both Hermes and Aphrodite and their son, appears in the Cypriot cult of the goddess in his masculine aspect: as Hermaphroditus.74 The original Hermes requires no special love story with Aphrodite to father Eros with her: he carried her within his own feminine aspect, and perhaps this was even his predominant aspect, before the masculine nature within him was stimulated.

But who was the original goddess, the great evoker? In Cicero, two names are transmitted: Persephone and, as the mother of Hermes' Eros, the first Artemis. A third name, whose bearer unites the two in a triad, was mentioned by Propertius, and likewise indicated the setting of the original wedding:75

Mercury is said to have arranged for the

virgin Boebeidos to lie beside Brimo—

'Beside the sacred shores of Lake Beobes,' he explains, 'Brimo laid her virginal body beside Hermes.' Brimo is the great goddess of northern Greece, also known as Pheraia, after the Thessalian city of Pherai, who, on the one hand, could be equated with Demeter and Persephone and, on the other, with Artemis

and Hecate, since all of them sprang forth within her.76 Within her domain lies the lake, whose name—which in the local dialect corresponds to that of Phoebe—represents the domain of the 'first' Artemis. There she appeared, in that elemental virginity which does not fear virility as something deadly, but rather provokes it, and thus demands and obtains it. A virility which – to use the words of a modern writer who emphasised the feminine nature and imagined the worshippers as a merely phallic divinity –77 nevertheless 'did not enjoy an independent personality, but was a mere servant of the goddess, of the woman'. Just as for Hermes the feminine represents only opportunity, for the primordial woman it is merely impersonal virility, in a sense, a plaything.

Perhaps we can dispense entirely with the origin of Uranus and Hemera, and admit it solely for Aphrodite. Hermes, the primal lover, is called upon or chosen by the primordial woman: as the very masculine half of the primordial Aphrodite, as the phallic servant-god of the primordial Artemis of Lake Beobes. All these elements of the primordial situation are transmitted: the great goddess, the primordial living herma and, as a backdrop to all this, also something of the primordial waters, the setting of the primordial mythological becoming.78 Certainly, it must be regarded as the vestige of a distant memory, from the time when Hermes possessed a spring with sacred fish in the Peloponnesian Pharai – a sort of fish-filled pond.79 And he was also worshipped in Arcadia, in marshes and springs.80 Often the herms do not readily know the way and point out the nearest spring to the traveller.81 The statue of Hermes from the Thracian city of Ainos – a very ancient herma – was, according to tradition, retrieved from the sea.82 Such associations of Hermes with water also suggest that he would soon have as his lover the primordial goddess, in the form of Hecate,83 and soon also Triton, with the body of a fish.84 Nevertheless, Hesiod, our oldest source, precisely where he most extols Hecate, mentions Hermes alongside her (Theogony 444), and it makes perfect sense that the members of this couple should belong to one another.

Of all the classical manifestations of the primordial mythological goddess, by virtue of which Hermes has been regarded as the archetypal secret lover in the world, Hecate is the most enigmatic. She too,

like Angelos, must be as agile as her purely celestial double: Iris. She, like Hermes, also guides spirits and stands at crossroads, a hecataia clearly arranged on a triangle, as strange in the classical world as the square herms that were also found at the wayside. There, like Hermes, she received cakes and smoked eggs at every new moon.85 Both protected the gates and brought wealth to the stables (Theogony 444). She was less involved than Hermes in fertility. Her associations with an eroticism that might be considered crude and abject, and with souls and ghosts, are characteristic of her.86 The same holds true of Hermes, and indeed, this is his problem: it is even more questionable, since now, and in this respect, the father can also be compared to the son. At the highest level of idealistic and reckless Eros, which sacrifices itself with exultant ardour above one's own life, it is possible to imagine the union of the phallic, the psychic and the spiritual, but at such a low level, so 'Hecatean'…? Although we should bear in mind that the Hermetic being, viewed from its most archaic representations, perhaps only seems so shallow to us, whilst there, in the place where Hecate – as 'Aphrodite Zerynthia' in Samothrace – ruled the Thracian world of northern Greece,87 precisely there the most crude is the most sacred and the most animic.

3. THE MYSTERY OF THE HERMA

Hermes, the origin of his world, constituted a highly archaic narrative through the aforementioned mythological motif, to which Herodotus surely alludes, and which traces back to the very origin of life. More precisely, reduced to a masculine form of the origin of life, it remains in the vicinity of the feminine form, but only draws near until she, the more mobile one, can favour the other, the more persevering one, with two novelties: herself and the consequence of her mobility, the child. This consequence may also be called Eros, and may be Hermes himself in his infantile aspect, as in the Hymn. Not because it had sprung from the child, nor because it had developed into the classical figure of Hermes, but because it had, in a certain sense, been forged at its core, and because the masculine form of the origin of life had appeared in the hermas, in which the mythological motif of northern Greece would formulate the text. In fact, these traditions have long been linked to the account to which Herodotus alludes.88 The historian, who draws directly from religious life, explains that the Athenians were the first Greeks to adopt the ithyphallic form of their herms, taking it from the Pelasgians, whose customs are preserved in Samothrace and endure in their mysteries. The very same mysteries in which the illustrative sacred story is also narrated (II, 51).

Herodotus is not the only figure in antiquity to make such a claim. Callimachus, a scholar well-versed in the living Greek religion, not only gave credence to it, but also drew upon his own experience and various accounts. His poem, which began with a question addressed to an Itifallic herma, has not survived. We know only, from the summary of its content, that the god questioned did not refer to the legendary Pelasgians, but expressly to the Tyrrhenians, the archaic Mediterranean peoples who still inhabit the islands of the Thracian Sea, and to their account of the mysteries,89 μυστικὸς λόγος. Researchers and witnesses from the Classical and Hellenistic periods thus confirm that the hermas contain material that was also expressed in a sacred narrative, in a mythological motif. They also indicate the place where both—the form of representation and the mythological motif—felt at home: Samothrace. The Thracian world of northern Greece forms a

that is centred on the island and also encompasses the region of Lake Beobes. The mythological motif that developed in that place, for both internal and external reasons, may essentially be identical to the sacred story of Samothrace. Perhaps there exist, precisely there, other forms similar to the figure of the herma that strikes us as so strange.

Let us first consider the object of our wonder. Not only the ithyphallic composition, but also the square base of the herms: quod quadratus deus solus habeatur – as was often said. However, the square form required a different assessment of that part which, linked to it by the ithyphallic element, was the sole and final reference to the mysteries of Samothrace. In antiquity, it was known that the conversion of the square form into the classical one was an Athenian invention.90 Probably inspired by the older form of similar tombs, somewhat broad, and more flattened than tapered,91 though this should not lead us to think that the idea of Hermes developed from there. Nevertheless, should this idea have been combined precisely with the phallic, it would easily draw into its sphere – we shall now see why – the tomb, the funerary monument, and the artist too might have drawn inspiration from it. But the herma was not created until the square base had become established: an archetypal form of expression for the whole, insofar as this is rooted in the foundation of the world. Greek coin-makers employed the same form as a quadratum incusum in an equally unconscious, yet no less symbolic, manner on the most chthonic part of their small, rounded works of art.92 Such roots, in the sense of being both strong and chthonic, are well-suited to the square base of phallic representation. In Arcadia, where the ‘Cilician form’ was surely the original, the square base was used with greater preference, including for the cult statues of other deities.93 Later it became commonplace, and in most cases entirely expressionless. Among the herms of the Arcadian gods, that of Zeus Teleios, in Tegea, is the exemplar of the archetypal meaning. Teleios represents a Whole, which also encompasses the chthonic aspect of being, as an epithet of Zeus and Hera, of that totality attained in marriage. Precisely this is what is prefigured for us humans through them: the archetypal (though not ‘ideal’) marriage.94

Thus, the square shape of the herma is not unfamiliar to the Greeks; nor was the ithyphallic composition unfamiliar to them, nor did they find it indecent. To the Olympian gods, no doubt, it did not seem fitting, if we exclude Hermes, whom we are specifically seeking to understand here. Nevertheless, in Attica, minor deities were worshipped who, in this sense, bore a resemblance to Priapus, the Hellespontine,95 and among them was one with whom he was, moreover, equated: Tychon. The name means 'the successful one', that of someone accustomed to 'being lucky', naturally in the erotic sphere. Thus, of the Hermes bearing the same epithet, we may say that, in fact, the name is a formidable 'success'.96 This also seems to apply to the priapic form. Although the Athenians, to clarify this status, set him apart from those minor spirits and preferred to conceive of a sacred history of the mysteries. It was not only Herodotus and other scholars who acted in this way, but also ordinary people. There was a famous statue of 'Hermes at the entrance' to the προπύλαιος in front of the Propylaea of the Acropolis, and popular opinion held that from there 'one did not participate in the mystery', ἀμύητος.97 It was the work of Alcamenes, a herma in which the phallic-hyperbolic element—which reminded Herodotus of the Cabiri—had been concealed.98 The remaining, substitute part did not shine as a fully valid sign of a τετελεσμένος. We must, therefore, follow Herodotus and Callimachus to approach the mystery of the herma in the sense they ascribe to it.

In other parts of Samothrace, in addition to the true mysteries, as we had expected, we also find certain parallels to the mysteries and other indications, particularly when we include within the Thracian region the closely neighbouring and, in many respects, akin region of the Phrygians. One such figure is Priapus, who, according to a later tradition, is the son of Hermes. His cult originated near the Hellespont, in ancient Phrygia, and from there spread to the neighbouring Greek cities. However, this does not represent a significant equivalence, since Hermes also acts in the same way when he restores the procreative power to the hero of Petronius's satirical picaresque novel (Sat. 140), which corresponds to the era and the intentionally vulgar nature of the novelistic narrative. It is all the more significant that, in this context, it is precisely Hermes, the guide of souls, who is highlighted, and that this is explained as follows: qui animas ducere et reducere solet, 'he who guides souls and brings them back'

‘on his return’. Well, what matters is the connection with Priapus, for he too has a similar relationship with death. He guards not only the gardens, but also the tombs. The place where he has been erected is mortis et vitai locus, the place of life and death. The epigram, which highlights his life-giving effect—so clear and concise in the realm of death—dates from the early imperial period (CIL, VI, 3708) and, nevertheless, corresponds to the Phrygian custom, according to which phalluses were to be erected above tombs instead of monuments.99

A renowned scholar of the ancient world, despite travellers’ accounts, refused to believe in the existence of such pillars beside the tombs. Others saw their form as somewhat deceptive and haphazard. But a breakthrough came when a distinguished archaeologist undertook to seek, amongst this collection of monuments, the meaning behind the most beautiful design. We also owe to him his subsequent publication,100 in which he argued that this was a symbol of paternal rights, and that originally it could only belong to a male tomb. The image was intended to preserve the sexual vigour of the deceased. An explanation that fits, more or less, with the Petronian level. Despite this, the meaning of the ‘symbol of paternal rights’ is unclear, as phalluses also appear on Etruscan tombs, even though men lived without issue in that matriarchal culture.101 It also presupposed that the meaning the observer accepted as valid had already been forgotten by the time the tomb was completed. Such is the case with the stone phallus in question, almost a metre high, which bears precisely the name and relief of a woman: that of ‘Lisandra of Alexandros’.

This flawed explanation does not diminish our gratitude to the curator of this unique monument at the Izmir Museum, for he speaks, if we are to trust his lively manner of expression, in very clear language. At the base of the phallic monument, resembling a mushroom, a herma set into it displays the late form corresponding to the period of the tomb (2nd century BC): and it is not ithyphallic. On the outer sides, on either side, there are two dogs, the companion animals of Hecate, the guide of souls. There, then, is the Hecatean-Hermetic sphere, into which the realm of the souls of Hades may spill in a phantasmagorical manner. At the crown of the lower section, the deceased sits upon the throne, like a Demeter, and is attended by a smaller girl. From a

On either side, two winged beings present her with a crown and a sacred band. Their butterfly wings identify them as figures representing the soul, as ‘psyches’. To the right, in front of the enthroned figure, a serpent coils with its head raised: it reminds us of that of Demeter, with whom the initiate befriends,102 standing before the goddess’s throne, in a frequent depiction of the mysteries. The complete sculptural ensemble represents a sphere of glorification, spiritually emphasised by the two psyches that ascend indistinctly from the lower part of the sphere. These psyches are notable for wearing men’s clothing,103 and are therefore male souls, who bestow the symbols of immortality upon the dead woman. As male psyches, they also fit in a special way with the tomb, which as a whole represents an indistinct unfolding and depiction of the herm set into the lower part. The monument itself immediately prompts the question we ask ourselves: does the stone phallus and the herm with it not signify the same thing for the honoured woman as those male souls? Does the original source of immortality, from which both women and men drink, signify an eternal continuation of conception and, therefore, also a continuation of life? This would be precisely the nature of the soul, conceived from its origin – the origin of life contained within the masculine.

The phallic, as the source of life, is not merely a spiritual concept in Phrygia; it was already so for the Greeks of the Archaic period. And this means that the seed is also a soul, and this view is already depicted in an image featuring black-figure figures on an Attic vase.104 It depicts a bearded man playing a double flute. The man is ithyphallic. And four drops of seed are about to fall in the direction of a large flying butterfly, where a first drop had apparently already landed. In this role as a pourer of souls, an ithyphallic herm appears on a gem, which may be Priapus, or could also be Hermes.105 In this image the butterfly is already flying and the spiritual situation is highlighted by a peacock situated next to a fountain. The golden and blue celestial bird symbolises immortality on ancient Italic gems, and is linked to the story of Ennius’s rebirth.106 In Greek, the butterfly is known by the name of the soul, ψυχή, but the moth is called φάλλαινα, a feminine form derived from φαλλός, as, for example, λύκαινα, the ‘she-wolf’, from λύκος, the ‘wolf’.107 Even though this name (in its Latin form phallaena, from which the Italian and Spanish falena derives) is adapted to the

This conception of the psyche as the soul of the female butterfly demonstrates that it is precisely this concept that gives rise to Lysandra's phallic tombstone. The psyche that flies away like a moth (the double meaning of this Greek word, which originally meant 'soul' and only later also 'moth', cannot be expressed in any other language), has a masculine origin, and this is reflected in both representations in a truly conclusive manner. This psyche thus conveys something masculine: indeed, the very form of immortality that the male psyches bestow upon Lysandra in a symbolic manner. That which is immortal is seen primarily, and also in women, in the aspect of the mobile, of the masculine.

In the guise of which god? Certainly that of the phallic and spirited Hermes. We have discovered, from the broader realm of the mysteries of Samothrace, the meaning of the bond that unites that which proved so difficult for us to comprehend in the essence of the god. Though we find it not in any doctrine, but in a direct, authentic and immediate gaze: in a precisely evident and expressive aspect of the experience of the origin of life. Such an idea may well appear in images that float freely, in symbolic representations and in the very natural phenomena that can be interpreted as symbols. And, in a certain sense, they may also constitute a crystallised form, the content of religious processions and the mysteries. In any case, behind the symbol – of the natural phenomenon, of the representation, of the celebration – another dimension opens up, a fifth one. The origin of life in four dimensions – corporeal and temporal – conceived as reproductive, has several aspects: one masculine and one feminine, one creative and one mortal. And yet, it reaches yet another dimension when the origin of life is truly explored, when the origin itself is investigated. And we might even say: an aspect explored in itself, such as perhaps the masculine as phallus or a phallus conceived as a moth, which for us would lose the fourth dimension—that of time—and exchange it for the fifth: the temporal with the notion of timelessness and a beginningless principle of origin, pure being. In all the representations that make up the entirety of Greek religion – in worship, in myth, in mystery – the dimension of time is absent. It appears in myth as if it were a singular pre-time, from which time first emanates.108 It is present everywhere and yet, wherever one

Look into the world of this religion: to the open eye, the primordial meaning and source will be visible in the plasticity of nature.

The essence of our knowledge of the mysteries of Samothrace lies in the plasticity conferred upon the masculine aspect of the origin, which continues to work eternally within man.109 The gods who stand at the centre there, the Cabiri, are even more impersonal – according to Herodotus and other sources – yet they appear as masculine as the herms themselves, for they manifest only when they are in the majority. In the sanctuary of the Samothracian mysteries stood an Ityphallic couple.110 In which the old Goethe divined their hermetically blissful essence:111

They are gods! Wonderfully singular,

eternally regenerating themselves

without ever knowing what they are.

This ‘never knowing’ would signify the phallic-blind, the purely impulsive, as opposed to the hermetic, that which, in its own way, knows itself to be phallic. Goethe’s Cabiri attain the spiritual only gradually (‘The fourth…’, he said, ‘was precisely the one who thought for them… on Olympus… who knows, perhaps the eighth too…’), since it is not contained within their own origin, as it is in Hermes. How things stood in this regard for the original, pre-Greek Cabiri, we may never find out. In the Greek world, the Cabiric also attained a transparency akin to that of the Greek gods: as Dionysian as it was Hermetic. In a highly eloquent image on a vase of the Cabir of Thebes, we can see how the male lineage of the origin of life begins with the father Cabir, continues through his son Pais, and proceeds thereafter in Pratolaos, the primitive man, to the male part of the primordial pair of lovers: in the myth, in the man called ‘seed’, which in reality signifies infinite continuity.112 The mediation of the gods towards men, from the original source of souls with regard to creatures with souls, is here Dionysian, suggested through the wine krater before which

Pais stands, whilst Pratolaos turns his back on him. There the Dionysian mode prevails, and the father, in his most powerful guise, is Dionysus himself.

Another form of mediation is the Hermetic one: that of the guide of souls and messenger. The role of Hermes as messenger was attributed to an initiation in the Hymn, in which he was explicitly linked to the underworld. The god of the mystery himself is usually the first initiate, as, for example, Demeter at Eleusis, who lived out in an exemplary manner what her mystes relived. There can be no doubt whatsoever as to the kind of mysteries referred to in the hymns. The Cabiri purified Angelos in Lake Acherusia, and made her a goddess of the realm of souls. By their phallic nature, they are gods of souls. Hence, precisely, it is also Hermes who assumes the leadership as the guide of souls, which consists of ducere et reducere, and which in the Hymn is linked to the role of messenger by virtue of his Cabirian nature. And perhaps this is where the point lies at which he and the Cabiri agree so broadly, such that the herm can be regarded as the symbol of the mysteries of Samothrace. Hermes, as a Cabirian god of the mysteries, is ithyphallic and a guide of souls. This is why the phallic could only appear in the Hymn indirectly, through the god's titanic gestures, and also why the phantasmagorical was merely hinted at. This is precisely where the phantasmagorical originates, for the origin of life is an outpouring of souls. That grotesque dwarfism – essentially embryonic and grotesque – depicted in the images on the vessels of the Cabir of Thebes113 is likewise merely a manifestation of the essence of the soul: which is there, under the sign of Dionysus, and unfolds in the spirit of farce. The first pourer of souls, however, will always remain the guide of souls, the messenger and herald between the realm of souls and the world of the living.

The great goddess, who by the lake Beobes brought the first bestower of souls into the world, is the mother of souls, the sovereign of ghosts, appearing under many epithets and forms: as Hecate, as Rhea Cybele (the representation of the original Artemis of Asia Minor), as Demeter, and as Persephone. She was, therefore, as has been said, easily identifiable for many reasons with the mythological motif, which already referred to her, and also with the sacred history of the mysteries of the Cabiri, to whom Herodotus alluded. The identification acquires great plausibility in itself. However, whether both stories were identical, and whether the names

appeared in them were exactly the same, is one of those questions that never receive an answer. But the observation of the same mythological situation in Samothrace is sufficient to confirm the essence of the correspondence. Among all the names just mentioned, the original goddess was the one who reigned on the island.114 Classical mythographic tradition,115 which in its accounts of the mysteries of the deities deliberately avoids clarity, calls the original mother of the Cabiri 'Cabiro', and furthermore speaks of 'three Cabirian nymphs'. It thus dissolves the triad in an equally classical manner, as if the artist were sculpting a statue of Hecate surrounded by three figures of dancing maidens, whilst the other were depicted as three individual goddesses, smaller in stature and endowed with the attributes of the great goddess.116 So too do 'the Cabira nymphs' behave in relation to the mother of the Cabiri. In Thebes, the great goddess Demeter is called Cabira, thus attesting to her connection with the realm of the dead, as well as with that of the Cabiri. In all these manifestations, she represents the original feminine essence of the masculine absolute – the Cabirian mode of being – as taught to us by the mythological motif of the primordial herm.

It is a realm of souls represented by the primordial essence of all incarnations of living creatures, which appear there as female figures: an intermediate realm between being and non-being, as well as the reason for and foundation of the messenger's existence. The original messenger and intermediary moves between the absolute 'no' and the absolute 'yes', or more specifically between a double 'no' set against one another, between two enemies, between woman and man. He is there, on ground that is not ground, and creates the path. From a world devoid of viability, without compromise, which flows and is ghostly, he magically creates the newborn. To him belongs the staff that conjures the souls of magicians and necromancers, the one we so often see in the hand of Hermes. But to him also belongs a herald's staff, with the two serpents entwined as a sign of enmity and love, as a symbol of mediation. This original image appears in the form of the belt that in archaic times already adorned the body of the primordial goddess: the giant Gorgon – another figure of the original Artemis – in Corfu. However, placed upon Hermes' staff, as a later common form of the caduceus, and perhaps for this reason, it took a long time to be incorporated into monuments, since its role in the mystery – like the messenger in the Hymn – is that of mediator between death and life. The lineage of the heralds, that of the Cerices, was

in Athens that of a principal bearer of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The first progenitor was Hermes.117 And Hermes was, according to one tradition, the one who, with Daeira – an enigmatic manifestation of the primordial goddess – begot Eleusis, the founder of the site of the Mysteries.118

What, then, do Hermes' explicit connections with the mysteries of the Cabiri consist of? Whilst we have so far only discussed the fundamental aspects of his association with the Cabiri—in which the primary role is played precisely by the herma as a phallic monument—we must still consider a couple more general points in order to properly assess the background. The first of these concerns the herma once again. It concerns the figure as a whole, of which the head—supported by the square base—is also a part: a symbol of self-awareness and of his own essence. However, the god's name derives from the lower part of the figure. Hermeias, or Hermes for short, is an evolution of ἔρμα, which is not the name given to a 'pile of stones', ἔρμαξ or ἑρμαῖον, both derived from ἓρμα, but rather that of a single stone, which could also be used, for example, as a supporting pillar or ballast for ships, since the word has both meanings.119 Thus, it was the simplest monument to conceive, regarded as a phallic monument, offered by nature itself as the original symbol of the Cabiri and the idea of Hermes. The first among the ancient pre-Greek Mediterranean peoples of the islands and the mainland; the last among the Greeks. An archetype between two typical cultural forms120 that represented an impetus for deployment, with the stone signifying something that man had already experienced as immediate, as divine possession. Thus could Hermeias manifest himself in many places, even to the very limits reached by Greek culture, though probably not always as clearly as when the beholder was chosen by him: a poet who displayed a genuine hermetic spirit. Where the Cabiri had preceded him with their cult, mythological motif and mysteries, the new god could identify himself as one of their own, as a Cabir who had become transparent in spirit. But which of them, among such a representative majority? How does Hermes come to join a majority that, at the very least, consists of father and son? This is the second general consideration we shall now discuss.

In the absolute masculine – masculinity severed from the individual – both the progenitor and the one who has been begotten are present, since they are identical.121 The phallus, in the mythological motif of Aphrodite's birth, is also the child, just as Hermes is both the Cylenian monument and the Cylenian child. Nowhere does this identity appear as clearly as in the father's seed, which already falls in the form of a fruit. If the masculine soul is conceived as the eternal seed of the progenitor and of the one who has been begotten, it too continues to be, time and again, the begotten: father and son at the same time. The Ityphallic couple represents, in Samothrace, as the smallest number, the masculine in its minimal manifestation. The various genealogies of the Cabiri attest that one of them must be the father of the Cabiri. In the image on the Theban vase, so often cited, we can recognise the father and the son. And, certainly, the subsequent development as well: the primordial man and the original seed. As for the original Cabiri representing humanity, who appear here and in the Cabirian genealogy from the third position onwards, they do not concern us at this point. Hermes, according to the sacred history to which Herodotus alludes, can only be the first progenitor. Nevertheless, through the various accounts, he is explicitly and uniquely equated with the young Cabir, the son, named Casmilos. The reference to the existence of two Hermes does not correspond to the classical tradition. Let us recall: the word ἐριούνιος, which usually refers only to Hermes, appears to name a pair of chthonic gods.122 And on the vases we see the young and the old Hermes, side by side: in the scene, both hold the herald's staff.123 So very Cabirian, then, is this god, that he can even manifest as a duality.

Now, tradition tells us that Imbros, one of the islands from which the Cabiri were native, belonged both to them and to Hermes, and there he was known by the non-Greek name of Imbramos, 'the one from Imbros'. This would imply the existence of a pre-Greek Hermes, that is to say, a possible original Cabir. And, according to an inscription,124 there were also 'initiates into the mysteries of Hermes' there: τετελεσένοι Ἑρμῆι. Having raised the debate, it is pointless to ask whether there he was identical to Casmilos, who is listed in an inscription alongside the Cabiri, though isolated from them,125 just as is the case with Hermes himself in the testimony mentioned earlier. He was both father and son at the same time. As in the case of Hephaestus, father of the Cabiri. Under his sign

All Cabiri are Hephaestoi.126 And the most important testimony must also be assessed in this light.127 According to this, the triad, considered in the strictest sense as Cabira, consists of Demeter and Persephone (that is, the original goddess in two aspects), to whom Hades is immediately added, and a fourth element, which is mentioned separately: Casmilos, with Hermes. As is the case with the images on the vases in which the two Hermes appear, one instinctively thinks that the elder might be Hades, Persephone's more paternal husband, whilst the younger can only be Hermes. The ancient Italic accounts referring to Mercury, which largely concern the non-classical traditions of Hermes,128 although they take us far from our purpose—that of letting the Greek material speak for itself—would immediately confirm what was carried out by the phallic essence of the god. We shall merely note that on Etruscan mirrors Hermes is called turms aitas, 'Hermes of Hades'. This formulates, in an ancient Italic manner, his chthonic aspect129 and, yet, also points to a pair: Hades and Hermes, father and son of the Cabiri. The latter was also known in Italy as Mercurius Camillus,130 in reference to Casmilos, whose role in the Samothracian mysteries is compared by Varro to that of the young Roman, the camillus of the wedding.131 Casmilos-Camillus, the divine child and son of a divine father, seems even to have served as a model for the sons of the sacred Roman families, and above all for that of the Flamen Dialis.132

The resulting exclusive identification of Hermes with the young Cabir corresponds to the classical concept that, as early as the Iliad, depicted him in the form of a youth. Sculptors of the Archaic period sometimes portray him bearded and at other times in the prime of youth. A youthfulness that remains a defining characteristic. Originally, this was already linked to his essence as a Cabir, just as Hermes was closely associated with the youths of the gymnasium. His youthful figure was the only acceptable classical Hellenic form, both for the 'divine child' and for the 'son', for the firstborn and for the one first begotten.133 And his patronage of the gymnasium is likewise Cabirian. There he stands, upright, depicted with a bearded or youthful appearance, like a Cabirian Eros who piques our curiosity: a diligent and representative original presence and, simultaneously, displaying an agile and playful archetypal masculinity.

4. HERMES AND THE RAM

Have we, with Hermes, reached the very depths of the moving seed? Only in this way—whether taken literally or figuratively, through words—can this question be resolved, from which, at the same time, the world of Hermes opens up and becomes a reality. It is also time to revisit that question which, at the start of our reflections, we had put aside:
'How could precisely that appear to the Greeks as a god?' Not the world of Hermes, but its origin. By this, let us be clear, we do not mean the phallus, but literally something hidden, abyssal, which, to act, emerges from the depths of ancient times, and does so in that form of expression conferred upon it by nature itself – just as every organ reveals its meaning – which is that of the symbol known as the symbol of fertility. However, given that this is its mode of behaviour, the question becomes superfluous, and our only option is to reveal the depth—that with which Hermes has opened himself to us—in every corner of the monuments where it is perceptible.

A single account survives from that sphere—the one closest to the mysteries—in which the cult of the families[134]—or at any rate a cult—took place in the most intimate recesses of a Greek mansion. This is the first mention of the hermaphrodite in literature. Theophrastus characterises the superstitious man through the following description,[135] among others:
'He orders that on the fourth and seventh days of the month wine be boiled in the house, that myrtle branches be bought in the street, along with incense and cakes for the offering, and that, upon returning home, hermaphrodites be glorified throughout the day.' Does the exaggeration lie solely in the fact that the superstitious person performs their ritual throughout the entire day on every fourth and seventh day, or is it because inside their house there are also – in great numbers – statues of hermaphrodites? Was the presence in the house of at least a single statue of a hermaphrodite as commonplace as the placement in the street, in front of the entrance or in the courtyard, of a statue of Hermes and Hecate? Unfortunately, to be able to affirm or deny this with certainty, we have far too little knowledge of the cult practised inside homes

Greek. Only one thing seems certain, and that is that the three categories of statues of the aforementioned gods corresponded to those sacred objects inherited from the house's ancestors: to the 'paternal' gods, and even to the 'maternal' gods.136 In any case, they were connected to the family's origins: they represented the inexhaustible source of life and souls, which constantly causes them to spring forth anew. And yet, the hermaphrodite within the house represented, in some way, the primary cause of the spring, the original state restored in marriage which predates even the emergence of the original herm, the outpouring of souls. The plea of a widow to the hermaphrodite in a small Attic temple erected in his honour was not in vain,137 as she hoped he would restore that state, which represents much more than fleeting romantic happiness or a mere union for love's sake. The Greek people, even today, call marriage τὸ ἀνδρόγυνο: 'the essence of man-woman'.

The position of the statue at the entrance – whether in the courtyard or on the street –138 is that of a mediator. Hermes's connection to the central point of the house, to the goddess of the hearth, is confirmed by the Homeric Hymn to Hestia (XXIX). There, in that 'most intimate corner', he occasionally makes an appearance: Callimachus describes how he appears, leaping out from within, blackened by smoke, with the intention of frightening the divine maidens (Hymn 3, 69). The bride's chamber and the bedroom, however, are also among the 'most intimate corners': here Hermes reigns, according to a tradition from Euboea, as Ἐπιθαλαμίτης.139 The Cabirian guide of souls works both within and without. He leads souls from his realm, the world of paths, back to the warm life of the home, the home which in Greek means 'family'. In his role as mediator between the world of day and night, the world of men and that of spirits, especially when he stands there before a temple: between the world of men and that of the gods, he is Προπύλαιος and Πυλαῖος.140
Not just because the thief is the best guardian! In one inscription he is referred to as Πύλιος and᾽Αρματεύς:141 'He of the gate' and 'the charioteer'. Two other epithets, στροφαῖος and στροφεύς,142 show him in very close association with the hinges of the doors: at the entrance, therefore, and at the same time at a kind of central point, an axis; around which revolves that which is most decisive: the alternation between life-death-life.

Perhaps this is why so little has been recorded about the celebrations of Hermes, as they represent the most secret source and central axis of human existence. Nor were there many temples of Hermes:143 precisely because that centre existed in every place where men lived and died. Hermes turned every home into a confluence and a starting point for the paths that come from afar and lead into the distance. Moreover, by a spring of fresh water, he marked the entrance to a wellspring of life and death, to a point where souls emerge. In Crete,144 at a festival dedicated to Hermes, the 'inferiors', the slaves, ascended to the heights and were served by their masters. At another festival, in Samos145 – the celebration of Hermes Charidotes – theft and petty crime were permitted. Here or there, wherever he appears, even if only as
'Guardian', Hermes emerges and bursts forth from the underworld; but not from the mortal realm. Perhaps we should now coin the concept of 'underworld life'. To this realm belong all the 'servant spirits': every form of servitude that Hermes, in a certain sense, embodies. The reversal of relations between masters and slaves finds its closest parallel in the Roman Saturnalia, in the celebration of the winter solstice. And also its meaning: the strengthening of the weakest in that marvellous growth that is revived under the sun, after having 're-lived' it as seed and embryo. That which floats between being and non-being, of apparent powerlessness, of oppressed servitude, of life restricted to the night of the seed, finds the path to rise. Hermes the psychopomp, also called Harmateus, the charioteer of souls, guides it, brings it back…

This parallel – between the ascent of the soul and that of the sun – is imbued with great significance by an archaic depiction of Hermes. In the only festival dedicated to him, in which the sacred rite is known to us – the Tanagra festival – the most handsome young man would circle the city walls with a ram on his shoulders. He did so in imitation of the god who, presumably, by acting in that manner had driven away a pestilential disease.146 The figure of the ram-bearer, the Kryophoros, with whom Hermes is so often depicted,147 is a highly significant appearance. The account, explaining that Hermes had done so for the same purpose, may have been added later to the original mythological motif: for in its fundamental elements – the epiphany with the ram and the relationship – it is unequivocal and can scarcely

This should be distinguished from Hermes' other associations with the ram,148 which, as a sacrificial animal and a zoomorphic form of expression, belongs to the Cabiri.149 When Hermes, with Rhene – the Lamb – begot Saos, the founding hero of Samothrace,150 he certainly did so in the form of a ram. There is a whole series of images engraved on gems, in which he is shown in his ram-form, accompanied by one or several others – in one he even appears with four others.151 Equally unequivocal is the sacred history of the mysteries of the mother goddesses, to which Pausanias refers (II, 3, 4): as for what is said there about Hermes and the ram, he knows it, but will not reveal it. Hermes, in his form as a ram, begets the divine child of the mysteries, who – without being purely the sun –152 resembles the rising sun, and as the son of the ram-father, is also the lamb or the ram that Hermes carries and takes with him on his wanderings: a bearer of the sun with, in a sense, the new sun. Not for nothing are the golden rams of the fable offerings from Hermes. With such solar animals, as is well known, he bestowed gifts upon the house of the Atreides and upon Phrixus.153

Although we had not set out to explore the depths of Hermes, this has led us – along a truly hermetic path – a great distance. Viewed from a purely historical perspective, as far back as the prehistoric ram-god, whose form was adopted not only by Hermes but also – as a 'little sun'154 in the guise of the primordial child – by his brother Apollo.155 A figure which, of course, lacks the classical Greek meaning. Its lack of distinction is best seen in the herma with the rough ram's head, found near Gytheion.156 In this city in the southern Peloponnese, at the end of the 2nd century AD, there was also a temple157 dedicated to Amun, the Egyptian sun-god with the head of a ram. And, alongside it, a cult image attested that Apollo Carneios had been worshipped there. His epithet relates to κάρνος, a pre-Greek word158 for livestock,159 by which in Greece reference was always made first and foremost to the lamb. A ram-god preceded the later Apollo there, and his earlier archaic Mediterranean significance was still recognised in the fact that Amun – probably an original kinsman – had established himself at the very same place of worship. Carna, who in Rome took the feminine form of the name Carnos, was a lunar goddess160 and formed – like the moon and the sun in other mythologies – a pair with Janus, in whom the Romans, quite rightly,161 recognised a solar god whom they equated with Apollo.162 Hermes is never called Carneios, and his dual connection with the ram – as father and as

The Ram-Bearer—does not merely represent a simple equivalence with the sun. He does not represent, in the same way as the sun does, the source of light, but rather constitutes the source of that source. He was also the one who begot the dark lunar Pan. His world begins before sunrise, and he, the source of his world, can only be the one who causes a luminous spring to well up even amidst the outpouring of souls. Does not the sun rebirth in every soul that is once more led upwards, just as it is reflected in every drop of water? The sun, in the guise of Hermes, belongs solely and essentially to the soul, rather than to a mere reflection of chance. If both the light and its reflection, in the depth that precedes the origin of life, are engendered at the very same moment, then – and this was already known to the great Greek philosophers – the source of light and the spring of souls are but one.

5. SILENUS AND HERMES

Hermes was considered, not without reason, the inventor of language.164 The Greek language itself belonged to Hermetic wisdom, to its ingenious chance discoveries, which, like the word, belonged to the simple, mute stone monument: ἔρμα, from which the god's name derives, and which phonetically corresponds to the Latin sermo, 'speech' and all manner of 'verbal statements'.165 In the Greek language, ἔρμα does not appear with this meaning, that forms the etymological root for ἑρμηνεία, the 'explanation'. Hermes is ἑρμηνεύς, a mediator through the word, and not solely because of this harmony. He is creative by nature and the bearer of something radiant and enlightening; he is the god of explanation and interpretation, and also possesses that kind of spirit—that of the shameless narrator of his parents' love affairs—with which he seeks to penetrate the deepest secret.

Well, this is what the great secret represents here, the one which, even if revealed and explained, remains a secret: the appearance of a speaking figure who, in a certain way, embodies that clear, articulate, skilfully playful language, and who, precisely for that reason, enchants even the human-divine figures – his appearance in the deep primordial night, in which one expects only animal silence, without words or cries of pleasure and pain. Hermes, the Whisperer166 – ψιθυριστής –, spiritualises the most intensely animalised darkness. His epiphany completes the Silenian aspect of the origin of life, in which that animality is also displayed in the world of the Greek gods in an essential harmony and wholeness. Hermes and Silenus – or the Silenuses – in their phallic essence, do not sing as they would together in an outward manifestation. The luminous messenger of the gods, depicted by Praxiteles in the famous statue at Olympia, carried the infant Dionysus in his arms, as befitted the 'tutor of Dionysus', the elderly Silenus.167 The reason why Hermes may also appear in this role became clear to us through the meaning of the Kryophoros. He has been chosen as the bearer of all divine children,168 precisely as the bearer of souls and solar children. His connection with Dionysus is also highlighted by the fact that on Lesbos he had been a god of the vineyards. Silenus or

Hermes and the infant Dionysus represent, in a sense, a variation on the same theme; they are the two sides of the same reality. The supreme Greek wisdom – the awareness of this (which has never been expressed conceptually) – that the spiritual, hermetic aspect exists in gentle harmony with the other, with the animal-divine, is revealed to us in the most beautiful way in the image of a marvellous vessel. And it seems to occur without the artist's intention. Nevertheless, for us it will constitute the finest summary of our observations.

Let us recall that the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite mentions Hermes and the Silenus as lovers of the nymphs. However, it is quite a different matter when a London vase, known as the 'Psykter', by the painter Duris, and dating from the first quarter of the 5th century,[169] depicts a boisterous group of Silenus, partly phallic, whose ringleader – in a sense the eldest in the chorus of satyrs – appears bearing the symbols of Hermes – the travelling cloak and the herald's staff. We must also linger over this image before turning our attention to the other, which sums it all up. No nymphs appear here. Drunkenness and wine vessels, with which they wander playfully, reveal the admirers of Dionysus, half-animal, half-god. But why does Hermes appear to us through the Silenus who leads the group? The depiction, it seems, reflects the chorus of a satyr drama playing a specific role: perhaps that of Hermes the messenger, but instead the chorus of satyrs has been sent to, for example, escort Hephaestus back to Olympus. This is one possibility, alongside others that may apply. The appearance of the Silenus at the Dionysian festival of the souls of the Anthesteria, in itself, and as admirers of Dionysus, is entirely natural. A renowned scholar of religion regarded the Silenus or satyrs, in such scenes, as the very spirits of the dead.170 He was probably mistaken only in equating the satyrs and Silenus with the souls, without evidence and contrary to the general view. Let us start from there, and we shall recognise in them what they represent: openness, the source of life pouring forth. The Anthesteria, for the souls, were open days, and the fifth and final day, called χύτροι, was even a day for Hermes.171 It was a day on which the very essence of the form of the Silenus and the guide of souls was to come to light, also through the attire of Hermes.

In the image that truly interests us, this is not merely a matter of possibilities. It is a Berlin amphora, from the same period as the Psykter of Duris, whose master, the artist, is generally known by the same name as the piece. ‘The slender elegance of the world of his mobile figures, which adorn rather than explain – as an expert on the decoration of Greek vases puts it –172 in their silent poetry, had never before taken on such a clear form as it does in the figures on the Berlin vase.’ From which the chorus vanishes from the observer’s view. Whether it has receded into the background or not is entirely irrelevant. Before us stands a unique pair: Silenus and Hermes. And between them, tamed by Dionysian magic, the tender figure of a roe deer signifies the docility into which the wild world has been transformed, in the vein of the rhythmic-infinite, with spiralling meanders marking the earth upon which this significant encounter of gods takes place. It is not a scene – as far as we can make out – depicting a drama among satyrs! And even if it were, these features would still convey everything: the circumspection of the animal and the superhuman intelligence of the mind, and the essences that nonetheless merge into one another. Silenus holds the lyre and the plectrum used by Hermes, who stands behind him, almost as if he were his double, yet clearly identified by his hat and winged shoes, holding Silenus’s Dionysian vessel in his hands. The roles had been reversed, and they could do so, for in the deepest depths, where even Hermes is but a Cabir, they have but one task and it is the same: to magically bring forth, from the dark abyss, the luminous life, that which both represent, each in their own way.

It was the Hermetic form, an unforgettable melody of Greek mythology which, with all its Cabiro-Silenic vibrations, in the face of all these considerations, would even once again shake the mediators gifted in languages and the psychagogues. He who fears neither the dangers of the deepest depths nor the newest paths—those which Hermes is ever ready to open—may, as a researcher, interpreter or philosopher of the greatest discoveries, follow him and reach the surest heights. For all those for whom life is an adventure—be it of love or of the spirit—he is the universal guide.173

Koinos Hermes!

NOTES

1.

Walter F. Otto, his seminal work: Die Götter Griechenlands, Bonn, 1929, p. 132 ff. [Spanish edition available: Los dioses de Grecia, Madrid, Siruela, 2003]. The following quotations are taken from this beautiful book. The two verses, in which the second ‘man’ is transformed into a ‘god’, are from the work Huttens letzte Tage by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer.

2.

Compare K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 239 ff.

3.

Compare with the version by Jung/Kerényi, Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 184 ff. [There is a Spanish edition: Introducción a la esencia de la mitología, Madrid, Siruela, 2003].

4.

See Hesych, s.v. κτέρες; F. Solmsen, Indog. Forsch. 3, 1894, 96 ff.; C. v. Oestergaard, Hermes 38, 1903, 333 ff.; H. Güntert, Kalypso, Halle, 1919, 162 ff.

5.

See in this regard, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 109 ff. [Spanish edition available: La religión antigua, Madrid, Herder, 1999].

6.

It is noteworthy in II 104 that it does not say: ‘Zeus sends the sceptre via Hermes to Pelops’, but rather: ‘Zeus gave it to Hermes, Hermes gave it to Pelops, Pelops to Atreus’, and so on.

7.

Since these lectures were delivered to an educated audience, not all of whom, however, were proficient in Greek, translations must have been used, even though the interpretation was naturally based not on these but on the original texts. For quotations from the Odyssey, Voss’s translations were used, with some alterations, chiefly those by Thassilo von Scheffer.

8.

K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 239 ff.

9.

Preller/Robert: Griechische Mythologie I, Berlin, 1894, 421.

10.

Hesiod, Fragments 112 Rzach; Serv. in Verg. Aen. 2, 79.

11.

Compare the treatment given to the Hymn to Hermes in Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, pp. 80–89, in which the god’s original childlike nature is emphasised.

12.

The following interpretations are based on the texts edited by W. Allen and E. E. Sikes, The Homeric Hymns, London, 1904. The translation is by Th.
v. Scheffer: Die homerischen Götterhymnen, Jena, 1927, with very few variations, mainly those where Scheffer disagrees with the text, and which habitually serve as his basis, from Allen/Sikes, without specific grounds, and in favour of philological conjectures. Among the commentaries, those by L. Radermacher have been used above all: Der homerische Hermeshymnus, Sitz.-Ber. Vienna, 213, 1, 1931.

13.

Compare Hesych s. v. οὔνει; Th. Bergk, Philol., II, 1856, 384; Radermacher in reference to the point mentioned: C. M. Bowra, Journ. Hell. Stud. 54, 1934, 68.

14.

Ant. Lib. 25.

15.

See Jung/Kerényi, *Einführung…*, Hildesheim, 1980, pp. 149–221.

16.

The expression ‘she is strong’ is found in Od. 18, 325; regarding the amorous relationship between the rather immodest maiden Melantho and Eurymachus (cf. 20, 7), Radermacher (note 12) refers to the passage. The theft was already highlighted by the ancient interpreters of Homer, cf. Schol. in Hom. II. XXIV 24; among modern scholars: S. Eitrem, Philologus N. F. 65, 1906, 249.

17.

Compare K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1955, pp. 78–82.

18.

Compare K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 115 ff.

19.

See also Allen/Sikes (note 12) regarding the passage.

20.

Radermacher (note 12) on the passage.

21.

Compare W. Schmidt, ‘Geburtstag in Altertum Religionsgesch.’, Versuche und Vorarbeiten VII, I, Giessen, 1908.

22.

Preller/Robert (note 9) 391.

23.

Lykophr. 680. Harpocr. s.v. A four-headed Hermes stood at a crossroads with three paths in Kerameikos, Hesych. s.v. τριπέφαλος. And he demonstrates that this did not refer to the number of paths.

24.

Compare Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 87 ff.

25.

Suidas, Photios, Etym. magn. ἑρμαῖον.

26.

In Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 87 ff., the connection between Aphrodite and the tortoise should also be noted: Phaedias placed the goddess atop the primordial animal; cf. Plut. Coniug. praec. VII 421.

27.

In the passage referred to here, the Odyssey states (in Th. Scheffers' translation, 17, 270 ff.): '… I also hear the lyre's sound, which the gods created as a companion to the feast'. Compare also: '… delighted by the lyre, the companion of the sumptuous feast'. These parallels are significant because the poet further emphasises the irony of Hermes' words, expressing it through quotations and helping the listener to perceive the casual use of rhetorical flourish. The proverbial passage, which will soon appear, is presented to us in a formal manner in Hesiod, Works and Days, 365.

28.

Compare K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, pp. 104–110 ff.

29.

Likewise Radermacher (note 12), regarding the passage.

30.

Compare Otto (note 1), 142 ff.; K. Kerényi in Jung/ K. Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, 83.

31.

'As suitable for marital intercourse as for extramarital intercourse', Radermacher (note 12), referring to the passage; see the poem entitled Oaristys in the Corpus of the Bucolics.

32.

Compare Radermacher, ref. to the passage.

33.

See P. Philippson, 'Genealogy as a Mythical Form', Simbolae Osloenses 7, 1936.

34.

K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 95 ff.

35.

Otto (note 1) 42 and 135; K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 108 ff.

36.

Compare K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 94–103.

37.

The word was transmitted in a distorted form as φωνῆς. The correction is by G. Hermann. The reason is provided not only by the meaning, but also by the repetition in v. 385, where in the famous Moscow manuscript (in Leiden) φωϱήν appears instead of the usual φωνήν.

38.

In the Hymn they seem to compete with one another; cf. Eitrem (note 16) 250. But this is only in appearance: it is a divine game preceding the division of spheres, but not a ‘competition of cults’.

39.

See S. Eitrem, ‘Hermes und die Toten’, Christiania Videnkabs-Selskabs Forhandlinger, 1909, 5, 24 ff.

40.

This is the reading of the manuscripts in line 85. Allan and Sikes depart from it, and Th. v. Scheffer also chooses an alternative. Assuming that the listeners of old, as well as the present-day readers of the lectures on Hermes, would at the very least prefer to read the entire Hymn according to the translation of the original text, here and henceforth I shall attempt to offer the translation of the original text provided by Scheffer, which would, more or less, read: ‘[…] and the famous victor of Argos set sail from Piraeus with them, thus avoiding the migration […]’.

41.

Compare Radermacher (note 12) regarding the passage; it is a conjecture translated by Th. v. Scheffer.

42.

Compare K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 140 ff.

43.

Carm. II 7, 13; 17, 29; Sat. II 6, 15; See: Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 197 ff.

44.

K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 108 ff.

45.

The underworld significance of her amorous favours towards King Admetus, to whom, as queen, a figure of Persephone-Demeter-Hecate is associated (cf. Hesych s.v. Ἀδμήτου κόρη and Jung/Kerényi: Einführung, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 161), is also confirmed in this context. On the dark aspects of Apollo, see K. Kerényi: Apolo und Niobe. Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 38 ff.

46.

In line 552, instead of σεμναί ‘the honourable ones’ in the Moscow Hschr., μοῖραι is the old reading, Θριαί a new conjecture. Roughly translated as:
‘There are three most honourable ones, born as sisters…’.

47.

So it is in the legends of Pindar and in Plato’s childhood. According to Pindar, Ol. 6, 45 ff., the young Iamos possessed the gift of prophecy, and for this reason the snakes fed him honey. A summary of the evidence can be found in A. B. Cook, Journ. Hell. Stud. 15. 1895, 1 ff., which already sets out the correct interpretation of line 554.

48.

Virgil, Georg. IV, 219 ff.

49.

On honey as the food of the gods, H. Usener: ‘Milch und Honig’, Kleine Schriften IV. Leipzig-Berlin, 1913, 400. Compare also Radermacher (note 12) regarding the passage, where we will find a more extensive bibliography on this subject.

50.

S. Eitrem in RE VIII I, 784. Compare also the sortes Mercurii, F. Altheim, ‘Griech. Götter im alten Rom’, Versuche und Vorarbeiten XXII, 1, Berlin, 1930, 74.

51.

Dem. 171, 19. This single equivalence, which could serve as a starting point for commentary, and the designation of the magistracy as τέλη (Radermacher [note 12] on the passage) has been adapted from such a distant context that it might also be omitted.

52.

Schol. in Theocr. II 11. 12; G. Keibel, Com. Graec., fragm. I, Berlin, 1899, p. 161. The legend on which the blessing of Angelos is based belongs to a new class of mythological narratives, but this does not mean that the basis for it was not more archaic. On this connection between Hecate and the Cabiri, see K. Kerényi, ‘Das Ägeische Fest’, in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 92–119.

53.

This is the most valuable contribution of Radermacher's commentary to the understanding of the Hymn to Hermes. Th. v. Scheffer also follows a superfluous conjecture here. The translation of v. 97 should read: 'Schon war die helfende Nacht, die göttliche dunkle, zu Ende', and the continuation likewise, as Scheffer states: 'Größten Teils, und es hob sich schnell die weckende Frühe / Neu aber stieg zur himmlischen Höhe die hehre Selene…'.

54.

Porphyry in Hor. Carm. I 10, 9.

55.

The first was the introduction by L. Curtius: Die antike Herme, Diss., Munich, 1903; the second was that of L. Deubner: Der ithyphallische Hermes, in Corolla, presented by Ludwig Curtius, Stuttgart, 1937, 210 ff. Deubner thus refers to the 'god of the roads', but what he intends to convey by this is no better than what has been said regarding the spirit of a roadside sign: 'Aus dem Wegezeichen ist der Wegegott erwachsen' (p. 203).

56.

Ottto (note 1) is the work that is cited here again, and in greater detail.

57.

I owe the reference to the correspondence I had with him to Mr Armin Kesser of Zurich. I have before me the third edition, unchanged, of Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtung der Alten, Berlin, 1804.

58.

An exceptional case is that of the Danaids, who murdered their husbands on their wedding night and thereby gravely insulted Hermes, who, as Epithalamites, is also the guardian deity of the newlyweds' bedchamber. Consequently, they too had to be purified by him. Apollod. Bibl. II 1, 5, l1.

59.

Compare the great daimon of the Symposium, with K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 231 ff.

60.

Compare P. Philippson, Genalogie der mythischen Form, 16.

61.

Compare Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 82 ff.

62.

See ibid., p. 84, and 'Der große Daimon' in K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 241.

63.

Ibid., pp. 236 ff., 242.

64.

K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 213 ff.

65.

On ‘problem’ and ‘secret’ see R. Guardini, ‘Zu R. M. Rilkes Deutung des Daseins’, Schriften für die geistige Überlieferung IV, Berlin, 1941, 26; see also K. Kerényi, ‘Labyritnh-Studien’, in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996. p. 178 ff. [Spanish edition available: En el laberinto, Madrid, Siruela, 2006].

66.

Compare these notes in Allen/Sikes (note 12) regarding the passage.

67.

Preller/Robert (note 9) I 323; cf. Plut. De aud. poet. 44 e.

68.

Dating from the second half of the 5th century; Arch. Anz. 1890, 87; L. R. Farnell: The Cults of the Greek States V, Oxford, 1909, Vol. IV.

69.

For the following, see Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 161 ff.

70.

According to Cicero, in the edition by J. B. Mayor, Cambridge, 1885, III, 199 ff. And other parallel accounts from the same source: 205.

71.

Cic. De nat. deor. III 22, 56: Mercurius, born of Heaven as his father and Day as his mother, is said to have been aroused by a lewd act, having been moved by the sight of Proserpina. [There is a Spanish edition: On the Nature of the Gods, Madrid, RBA-SARPE, 1984].

72.

Compare Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 82 ff.

73.

Ibid., pp. 84 ff. and 151 ff.

74.

Ibid., 85 ff.

75.

II 2, 11; the text as reconstructed, based on Turnebus's sound conjecture: 'Brimo' instead of 'primo', which made no sense in the manuscripts.

76.

Jung/Kerényi, *Einführung…*, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 163 ff.

77.

D. H. Lawrence in Lady Chatterley.

78.

Jung/Kerényi, Introduction…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 73 ff.

79.

Paus. VII 22, 4; ibid., 85.

80.

On Pheneos and Stymphalos; the passages in Farnell (note 68) V 80.

81.

Compare the two epigrams cited from U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff: Hellenistische Dichtung, Berlin, 1924, II, 102 ff.

82.

Callimachus, Diégesis, ed. by M. Norsa and G. Vitelli, Florence, 1934, vol. VII, 32 ff.

83.

She bore him three daughters: Schol. in Lyc. Alex. 680.

84.

He begets Krataiis with her, Schol. on Hom. Od. XII 124. Theopompus in Porphyry, De abst. II 16.

85.

Preller/Robert I (note 9) 322 and 402.

86.

K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 128.

87.

Compare ‘Das Aegean Fest”, in K. Kerényi, Humanistic Soul Research, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 111.

88.

Compare C. A. Lobeck, Aglaophamos, Königsberg, 1829, II 1213.

89.

Callimachus, Dieg. col. VIII 33 ff.; cf. IV I.

90.

Pausanias, Book I, 24.3 and Book IV, 33.3.

91.

L. Curtius (note 55) 7 ff. and against R. Lullies, ‘Die Typen der griechischen Herme’, Königsberg, 1931, 42, in Die Wissenschaft am Scheidewege von Leben und Geist, Klages-Festschrift, Leipzig, 1932, 26, 9.

92.

Compare K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 165 ff.

93.

Summary of M. W. De Visser, Die nicht menschengestaltigen Götter der Griechen, Leiden, 1903, 23. And, furthermore, in S. Eitrem (note 50) 704 ff.

94.

H. Bolkenstein had not noted this important circumstance: (Gr. p. 137) Mededeel, Konink. Akad. Wetensch. Afd. Letterk. Deel 76, Serie B, No. 2, Amsterdam, 1933, which attempts, with little chance of success, to undermine the testimonies of ancient scholars that can easily be found in his work.

95.

Compare H. Herter, De dis Atticis Priapi similibus, Diss. Bonn, 1926.

96.

W. F. Otto (note 1), 142.

97.

Compare the passages in Preller/Robert (note 9) I 402.

98.

'Beneath the head of the προπύλαιος, created by Alcamenes, the ityphallus is inconceivable' – thus U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Helenen I*, Berlin, 1931, 162. Strange is the inscription pointing inwards, towards the soul of the copy, found in Pergamon: ΓΝfiΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ, which seems to say: 'Do you recognise yourself there, the divine-masculine within you?'.

99.

H. Herter, De Priapo, Religionsgeschichte Versuche und Vorarbeiten XXIII, Giessen, 1932, 232; the epigram ibid. 229.

100.

L. Curtius, Festschrift, L. Klages. Leipzig 1932, 19 ff.

101.

Compare on this F. Altheim, Epochen der röm. Gesch., Frankfurt am Main, 1934, 234 ff.

102.

As shown on the Lovatelli Urn in Rome, reproduced in Farnell (note 68) III T. XV a.

103.

Observation by Curtius.

104.

Compare H. Günert, Kalypso, Halle, 1919, which contains further bibliography.

105.

Herter (note 99) 134 and 160 ff., where further bibliography is given.

106.

See K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 258.

107.

O. Immisch, Glotta 6, 1915, 193 ff.; Güntert (note 104) 220.

108.

P. Philippson; his work Zeitart des Mythos has not yet been published. [It was published in 1944, a year later].

109.

‘Der große Daimon’, in K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 238.

110.

Hippol. Ref. V 8, 9.

111.

Faust II 8075 ff. Compare this commentary with ‘Das Ägäische Fest’, in K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 105 ff.

112.

Reproduced in P. Wolters, G. Bruns, Das kabirenheiligtum bei Theben, Berlin, 1940, Vol. 5. Compare commentary ibid.

113.

See the publication by Wolters/Bruns.

114.

Compare the passages in Preller/Robert (note 9) I 328, 4; 851, 2; 856 ff.

115.

Akusilaos of Argos and Pherekydes of Athens, both from the 5th century BC. Compare the passages in O. Kern in RE X 2, 1399 ff.

116.

Compare E. Petersen, Archäol.-epigr. Mittheil. aus Österreich 5, 1881, 26 ff. and 32 ff.

117.

Preller/Robert (note 9) I 41 I, I.

118.

Pausanias I 38, 7.

119.

However, ἕρμα never means ‘herma’, since in Greek this is called ‘Hermes’ or ‘little Hermes’, Ἑρμίδιον.

120.

See Jung/Kerényi, *Einführung…*, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 37 ff.

121.

See Jung/Kerényi, ibid., p. 86 ff.

122.

Ant. Lib. 25.

123.

‘Italic-Ionic amphora from Vulci’ (Munich) in A. Furtwängler/P. Reichhold, * * *Griechische* * * *Vasenmalerei*, * * Munich, * * 1906 * * Ser. * * I. * * T. * * 21 * * and
‘Etruskischer Stamnos’ (Gregorian Museum) in E. Gerhard, Auserlesene griechische Vasenbilder CCXL. We owe it to O. Fröbe-Kapteyn for having recognised the importance of the decorated vases and, in a sense, having rediscovered them.

124.

From the 4th century BC? Farnell (note 68), V 80.

125.

Farnell V 81.

126.

Photios s. v.

127.

Schol. in Apoll. Rhod. Arg. 1917, according to Mnaseas and Dionysodorus, by an Alexandrian scholar and a Boeotian historian.

128.

This was to be expected following Altheim's research. Regarding Mercurius, compare his Griech. Götter im alten Rom, Giessen, 1930, 39 ff.

129.

K. Kerényi, *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Relazioni*, vol. 9, 1933, pp. 17 ff.

130.

Altheim, op. cit. (note 128), 82.

131.

De lingua Latina VII 34.

132.

Compare K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 116 ff.

133.

Compare Jung/Kerényi, Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 99 ff.

134.

Compare K. Kerényi, ‘Der große Daimon’, in K. Kerényi, Humanistic Soul Research, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 237.

135.

Theophrastus, Characters 16, 10.

136.

H. Bolkestein, ‘Theophrastos’ Charakter der Deisidaimonia als religionsgeschichtliche Urkunde, Relgionsgeschesch’, Versuche und Vorarbeiten XXI, 2, Giessen, 1929, 45 ff. His subsequent conclusions are based on an underestimation of the mythological nature of the hermaphrodite.

137.

Alciphr. Epist. 3, 37.

138.

See S. Eitrem in RE VIII 1, p. 701, points 4 and 6.

139.

Hesych s. v.

140.

Compare the accounts in Farnell (note 68), V 66, and especially the Pythagorean explanation in Diog. Laer. VIII I, 31, which expressly links this characteristic of Hermes with his role as a guide of souls: He is, according to Pythagoras, ταμίας ψυχῶν, the ‘steward of souls’. Although nothing regarding this argument is intentionally discussed here,

compare with K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 15.

141.

Thus the ancient late interpretation in Suidas s. v. στροφαῖον. The same epithet in Aristoph. Plut. 1153, the similar στροφεύς in Phot. s. v.

142.

From Erythrai in Asia Minor, Farnell (note 68).

143.

M. P. Nilsson, Greek Festivals of Religious Significance, Excluding those of Athens, Leipzig, 1906, p. 388.

144.

Athens VI 263 F and XIV 639 B.

145.

Plut. Quaest. Graec. 55

146.

Paus. IX 22, I; W. F. Otto, Dionysos, Frankfurt am Main, 1933, 41 ff. [There is a Spanish edition: Dionysos: raíz de la vida indestructible, Madrid, Herder, 1998], who was certainly correct regarding earlier explanations, despite placing excessive weight on the words.

147.

Compare V. Höfer in Roscher II I 4 31 ff.

148.

Compare S. Eitrem, ‘Beiträge zur griech. Religionsgesch I. Der vor-dorische Widdergott’, Christiania Videnskabs-Selskabs Forhandl, 1910, no. 4, 5 ff.

149.

Compare H. v. Fritze in Zeitschr. f. Numism., 24, 1901, 111 ff.

150.

Schol. on Apol. Rhod. I 917; Diod. V 48.

151.

Eitrem, op. cit., 4 ff.

152.

For the essentials: see Jung/Kerényi: Einführung…, Hildesheim, 1980, p. 71 ff.

153.

Euripides, Orestes, 997; Apollod. Bibl. I 9. I.

154.

In the sense of the comments in Jung/Kerényi, op. cit.

155.

Compare, leaving aside Eitrem (note 148), Wide and Höfer (note 147) II 961 ff.

156.

Reproduced in A. B. Cook, Zeus I, Cambridge, 1914, 351.

157.

Paus. III 21, 8.

158.

This follows from the comments by P. Kretzschmer, Glotta 21, 1933, 88; it is also possible that the Greek word is of Illyrian origin and is related to the Irish ‘ancient stone mound’ carn; cf. Kretzschmer, Glotta 14, 1925, 91. From this it follows that the cult of the ram and the stone monument may have been very closely related and may belong to the pre-Indo-European archaic European religious heritage of various Indo-European peoples. Compare also with the Etruscan names for carna, as noted by R. Petazzoni, Studi Etruschi 14, 1940, 172.

159.

Hesych s.v.

160.

Pettazzoni (note 158), 163 ff.

161.

Compare, leaving aside Pettazzoni (note 158), 171 with note 59; O. Huth, Janus, Bonn 1932; and also F. Altheim on ‘Dies Sonne in Kult und Mythos’, Wörter und Sachen, NF. I. 1938.

162.

Compare the references in F. Börtzler, ‘Janus und Seine Deuter’, Bremen Wissensch. Gasellsch, 1930.

163.

This was the subject of the lecture at the Psychologischen Club, Zurich, March 1942; it later appeared as a commentary on the Homeric Hymn to Pan.

164.

Sermonis dator according to the inscription on a statue from Villa Albani, CIG. 5953, Farnell (note 68), V 62.

165.

It behaves in relation to sermo as χεῖμα does in relation to χειμών: E. Boisacq, Diction. Etym. de la langue grecque, Heidelberg-Paris, 1923, 283.

166.

Harpokr. s. v.

167.

At least since Sophocles; cf. E. Kuhnert in Roscher IV 476.

168.

Hermes, according to the image depicted on a vase, hands the infant Dionysus over to the elderly Silenus: Gregorian Museum II 26, in Roscher, op. cit. (note 147), 472.

169.

E. Buschor, Griechische Vasen, Munich, 1940, 164, reproduction 183 ff.

170.

A. Dieterich, Kleine Schriften, Leipzig, 1911, 421.

171.

Compare L. Deubner, Attische Feste, Berlin, 1932, 112.

172.

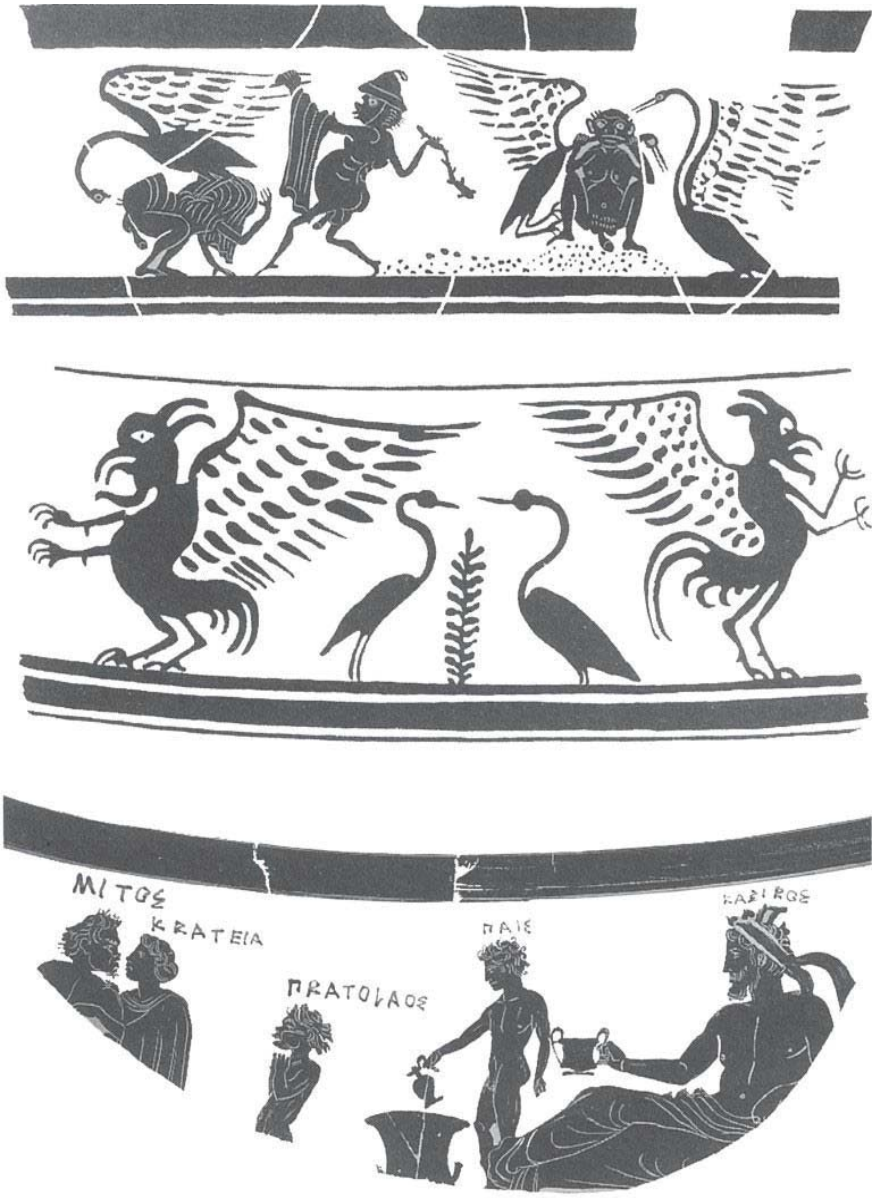
Buschor (note 169), 165, reproduction 166a.

173.

Compare K. Kerényi, ‘Labyrinth-Studien’, in K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 178–214.

III. MYSTERIES OF THE CABIRI

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES


MITOΣ
KRATEIA
ΠRATOLAOΣ
ΠAIΣ
KAΣIROΣ

Vase from the Cabirion of Thebes

1. THE MEANING OF THE TERM MYSTERIA

The Socratic quest for the ‘what’, the history of which ought to be written, is all the more unavoidable the more profound the changes to which the very object of historiography is subjected. The history of religion, wherever it begins, is subject to the most vulnerable: whether in the contemplation of the figures of the gods, in the description of cults, or in the retelling of mythological themes. It must always return to questioning the relevant meaning of the names of the gods as handed down, the traditional designations of religious forms, and their manner of conduct, narration and discourse: it must seek out ‘what’ lies behind the name ‘Hermes’ or ‘Helios’, behind the meaning of the designations
‘mythology’ and ‘gnosis’, so as to be able to refer merely to some of the advances that have already been made.1 The researcher, for whom these terms – as a contemporary man – possess a conventional meaning derived from the resonance of the names, runs the constant risk of situating them ahistorically within Antiquity. In no other field does this danger present itself with such intensity as in the mysteries.

Here, however, we are not referring at all to the entirely free use of the word (‘Everyone, dear Hyperion, has their mysteries, their secret thoughts!’, said Hölderlin). But there are mysteries which in Greek are simply Mysterion (μυστήριον) and are described as sacraments, teachings and experiences of Christianity. These mysteries and all those initiatory rites which, for us as contemporary men, correspond to mysticism in its fullest and broadest sense, possess a common characteristic that makes them easier and more succinctly conceivable than the ancient mysteries as a whole. This characteristic can be found, as is well known, in the work of the pagan philosopher Plotinus – who already belongs to the world of non-ancient mysticism – in which he discusses ‘the alignment of the one with the One’ (μόνου πρὸς μόνον):2 of ‘alignment’, that is, of exclusion from the world in which, as ‘one’, it already was
‘alone’ (μόνος), and the aim is to unify it with its own being in accordance with the
‘One’, in the All-One (All-Einigen). Whether the All-One is conceived in a monotheistic , as that One which is true, or in a

pantheistic as All-Being (All-Wesen), the orientation towards an essence or a being, which lies outside the diversity of our natural existence, remains a characteristic. Whether that essence or being, as occurs in Christianity, is conceived as something supernatural par excellence, or, as is the case in other salvific religions, is set in opposition to the varied world of nature, mysticism likewise aspires to the salvation of humankind as a liberating escape from all natural bonds.

Now, however, as we set out to familiarise ourselves with the pagan usage of Greek, with the group of words associated with Mysterion, our gaze is not directed towards the forms of the great mysticism of the East and West. The adjective
'mystical' (μυστικός), for a Greek of the classical era, is not even associated with representations that depart from the world of the senses and point in the direction of that great 'mysticism'. Quite the contrary. The
'mystical aura', which in Aristophanes' The Frogs points towards those who approach the blessed Mystes, the initiates performing their dances in the afterlife, is the scent of the burning torch (δάιδων αὖρα μυστικωτάτη). It is the atmosphere of a night-time festival, in its most obvious manifestation, that moves the 5th-century Athenian with the word 'mystical': their 'mystical' experience is a specific festive experience. In the form of a festival, of a calendar event, we converge with the
'mystical' in the history of Greek religion and arrive at a philological interpretation that is accessible to us for the first time.

Mysteria was the name given in Athens to certain festivals, which might also have been called Demetria, Koreia, or Perrephathia, after the goddesses to whom they were dedicated, and which may indeed have been known by those names. Attic tradition speaks unanimously of the Mysteria – 'mysteries' in the plural – which in modern Greek should consequently be written with a capital letter (Μυστήρια).3 The names of the festivals, being names that encompass events and processions during times of celebration, are always written in the plural in Greek. Grammatically, they belong to an adjective which, in everything that appears as a festive act in that period, links them to something divine – one might say: to the divinity, which there became an 'event'. In the Dionysia, the festivals of Dionysus, Dionysian objects are presented which are not necessarily solely 'Dionysian' objects, a Dionyson, or Dionysian thing, from whose name,

as a noun, the name of the festival would have been derived. It is also possible that it was a single sacred act that gave the celebration its name, as is the case with the Phithoigien, that is – with the obligatory reproduction of the ending – the Pithogia (Πιθοίγια), at whose festival the great wine kraterai, the Pithoi, were opened. This event set the tone for the day, during which, in a sense, everything became pithoigic. The emergence of the noun Pithoigia (Πιθοιγία) to define the act, or rather to give a name to the whole day, seems to signify a belated reification and consolidation. The original, and truly festive, form is the adjectival plural that recreates the atmosphere.4

A relatively short list of festival names, whose structure remains clearly similar to that of the Mysteria: Anakalypteria, Anthesteria, Kallynteria, Lampteria, Plynteria, Procharisteria and Soteria.5 The last of these is particularly revealing in terms of its constituent elements. The deity of the day is a divine 'saviour' (Σωτήρ)6 or a
'savior' (Σώτειρα);7 everything festive that takes place on that day is
'saving' (σωτήριος), and that is why the celebration is called Soteria (Σωτήρια). Our analysis, however, begins at the second level, with the secondary name of the saviour, Soter, whose root is that of the verb
'to save' (σώιζειν). This is precisely what they all have in common: the verbal root of all those names assigned to the festivals. All are older than Soteria, and almost all are characterised by the fact that, in most cases, the form corresponding to the nomen agentis Soter has not been handed down. The god of the Lampteria, Dionysus Lampter, represents the exception, even though Dionysus Anthester, as a god, is not known in the Dionysian festive cycle of the Anthesteria, and despite the fact that Dionysus, as the god of flowering, is given the epithets Anthios and Antheus. The name of the festival of flowering, Anthesteria, is derived from the verb 'to blossom' (ἀνθεῖν), and thus, linguistically speaking, this is how we must also explain the remaining names of the festivals listed: based on an event brought about or experienced by the deity – the shining forth and blossoming of Dionysus in the celebrations of Lampteria and Anthesteria, the bathing and adorning of Pallas Athena in those of Plynteria and Kallynteria, the awakening of Persephone in that of Anakalypteria–.8

But how is this understood in the Mysteria? There, too, this name is associated with a festival, in the sense of a period marked by numerous sacred events characterised by the season, and not merely by sacred acts, rites and ceremonies, as attested by a classical Athenian orator, who conceptually distinguishes the ritual event itself, the Telete (τελετή), from the Mysteria, and refers to the Telete of the Mysteria as the ritual of the celebration.9 On the other hand, the term Mysteria is precisely limited to a period full of rites, since otherwise Plutarch could not have said: 'In Eleusis, when the festive celebration was still at its height, we were attended to after the mysteries…'.10 Certainly, Plutarch was already living in an age in which the atmosphere was objectified, and the celebration was consolidated into a rite, into the ceremony par excellence. The word Mysteria, however, even suggests that the celebrations bearing that name were named after a significant rite. Here too there is a clear verbal starting point, as in the previously mentioned names of the festivals: a ritual act that was not celebrated alongside the cult image of the deity, as was the case with the Kallynteria and Plynteria, but alongside the men who in this way became, in a significant sense, both the object and the subject of the festival. The Myste (μύστης) underwent the Mysteria, became their object, but also participated in them.

We endeavour to interpret the Mysteria in the strictest sense, as they appear within the organisational structure of Greek life during the Archaic and Classical periods, and, in a sense, we trace them back to their origins: as festive events fixed in the calendar. Of all the calendars of Greek celebrations, the Attic calendar has come down to us in a fairly good state of preservation, albeit highly fragmented.11 This is the Attic calendar of celebrations we have already mentioned, when at the beginning, rather than speaking of 'mysteries' in general, we spoke mainly of the ancient Mysteria with which we are most familiar. It is that basic text which we shall continue to consider and which we shall attempt to reconstruct to the best of our ability, and within the context of which we would first like to determine the meaning of the word Mysteria. The Mysteria, as we know them, took place twice a year: in autumn, in the month of Boedromion, and in spring, in the month of Anthesterion. The autumnal ones were the 'great' or 'greater' Mysteria celebrated at Eleusis. In comparison with these, those celebrated

in the spring at Agra were known as the ‘small’ or ‘smallest’. The reason why they were not always given the same comparative and distinguishing names—such as ‘great’ or ‘greater’ on the one hand, and ‘small’ or ‘smaller’ on the other—was that in the calendar, for both months, only ‘Mysteria’ appeared, and at most, the place of the celebration was indicated alongside it.

And it is even more significant – which is why we needed the clause referring to the calendar text – that it was unnecessary to mention the deity alongside ‘Mysteria’, just as in the names of the other festivals. But if, as early as the 5th century, these specific Mysteria were regarded merely as special instances of other similar processions, and all were referred to as
‘mysteries’,12 various sources expressly identify Demeter and Persephone as the deities of both celebrations – both the great one at Eleusis and the lesser one at Agra. The references, however, are not so identical as to allow us to conclude that they were quotations from the Attic calendar. The opposite is more likely. The Mysteria, in their places of origin, could only be regarded as festivals of those deities. It is possible that the ritual act had an immediate effect on the participating men: it was a cult dedicated to the gods, and the festival was specific to those particular goddesses and no others. And this was the case – at least for the Athenians – in a wholly natural way.

Nowadays we would be more inclined – and this corresponds to Herodotus’s use of the word – to regard the Mysteries in a natural way as ‘secret cults’, without any special connection to those deities. This makes it inevitable that we should speak of that which is kept secret within the general sphere of ancient religion, before we turn to the secret cults that gave the Mysteria their name. The phrase ‘kept secret’ should not necessarily be understood to mean that it is a ‘secret’. At the very core, perhaps, lies a true secret, in the sense used by the religious writer, a contemporary of ours, who recognises the hallmark of a genuine secret in the fact that it has been experienced, admired, honoured and lived – without, therefore, being kept secret in any specific way, and yet remaining a secret nonetheless.13 Let us say that, in what is kept secret, the secret itself is less important than the act of keeping it secret.

In Greek religion, this is not an approach that is positive in its intent, but rather negative and arbitrary. It does not conceal and preserve the secret of what is kept secret with the genuine and authentic intention of secrecy and the genuine preservation of the secret. Contemplation of natural religions teaches us that, in the secret natural cults, it is a matter of something similar to what Goethe expressed when referring to nature itself:

in sacred and public secrecy.

What was kept secret in the Greek cult, certainly, even if it was something unnameable, was known to all those who lived in the vicinity of the place of worship. It possessed this character – the character of the Arreton (ἄῤῥητον) – regardless of the arbitrariness of the participants in the cult. For in its deepest depths – in that depth where it could be the object of worship – it was precisely unnameable: a true secret. It was only later that explicit prohibitions transformed the Arreton into the Aporreton (ἀπόῤῥητον).

The unnameable nature of natural secrets – such as the true secrets of the origin of life – perhaps becomes understandable when we imagine it on two distinct levels: the existential and the purely conceptual. On the existential level, it is we who act and suffer, and we feel deeply affected by our own actions and sufferings, in which there is only an event and no adequate words to explain it. An event which, on the purely conceptual level, must be presented in a clear and unambiguous manner, albeit in the non-emotional form in which biology expresses itself. But
Is it really still the same event that affects me? Is it my own experience? A purely conceptual representation encompasses only the general, that which is severed from the unique individual case; it speaks of an experience – drawing, in a sense, solely on my secret – yet does not name it: for it is unnameable. The representation of the cult alone is capable of elevating my event in the sense of the orientation of the general, which nevertheless continues to belong to me: my unnameable secret that I share with all humanity.

The paradox of secret and public cults was also that of the Attic Mysteries. They were merely isolated instances of the ‘Arretic’ – as one might define it, rather than the inappropriate and overused ‘mystical’ – in Greek religion. To speak of the secret would become a banality: for in expressing it, it would cease to be that Arreton which, in its unutterability, generated a special visibility and audibility and, in a certain way, created around itself an atmospheric body of actions and movements, of darkness and light, of silence and voices. Only he who revealed that atmosphere by evoking it, he who ‘danced’ or ‘staged’ the Mysteria, set out to express the unutterable. The most unpronounceable remained entirely unnameable and constituted the divine centre of the Mysteria: their true great goddess, who in the figure of Demeter and that of her daughter already appeared as something incongruous. She presided over the festivities as Arretos Kura: the unpronounceable maiden.

The Mysteries are exemplary cases of the ‘Arretic’, but they are merely individual instances alongside others no less marked. Let us mention a classic example from Athens: the Arrephoria, a festival of Pallas Athena, so named for the ritual comings and goings bearing the unpronounceable.14 The Arretons played a far more important role in Greek worship than was commonly believed. The unnameable was not spoken of and was therefore not divulged either. And the science of ‘Arretology’, this paradoxical and indispensable endeavour, without which a correct representation of Greek religion would be impossible, regards precisely this as the greatest danger: becoming the subject of talk and commentary, thereby robbing the Arreton of the atmosphere proper to their essence. If we do not conceive of the Mystikon as something inappropriate, but in its most original sense, as a defining element of the Attic Mysteries, it becomes a special form of the Arreton. And to speak of it is already Arretology. We must guard against sensationalism, against desecrating the sacred atmosphere, and against unintentional distortion of the atmosphere. Nevertheless, we must attempt the impossible and ultimately indicate at least what that Mystikon represented, in which the Myste, as the fundamental event of what would later be called the Mysteria, suffered and participated.

One clue is provided by language, and another is found in the monuments. The linguistic root of the term Mysteria – as well as of Myste and Mystikos – is a verb whose

ritual meaning is ‘to initiate’ (μυεῖν), a derivation of ‘to close one’s eyes or mouth’ (μύειν). The monuments – reproductions of a depiction of the initiation into the Mysteria of Heracles –15 indicate to us that here one should not think of silence in the presence of the Arreton, but rather of a ceremony of ‘closing the eyes’. Heracles is seated and his head is entirely covered; the Mysteria begin for the Myste as the one undergoing the event (μυούμενος); he closes his eyes and, in a sense, penetrates his own darkness, enters into the dark. Entrada, initia (in the plural) is the term the Romans use in their Latin translation, referring not only to the act of initiation, the act of closing one’s eyes, the Myesis—whose faithful transcription would be initiatio—but to the Mysteries themselves. A celebration – whatever its starting point, or the elevation to which it might lead – to enter into the darkness: this is what the Mysteria are, according to the original meaning of the word.

What is distinctive about this form of ‘entering and closing’ lies not so much in an individual meaning as in the cultic context, in a deeply personal experience of the Myste. Cicero, in his work on the laws, expresses this more general meaning on a conceptual level, using the word *initia* as an equivalent of the more philosophically resonant *principia*: ‘Initiaque ut appellantur ita re vera principia vitae cognovimus neque solum cum laetitia vivendi rationem accepimus sed etiam cum spe meliore moriendi’ [‘in the initiation we recognised precisely what were called the principles of life, and we acquired not only a reason for a joyful life, but also a greater hope for dying’]. However, the principia vitae, recognised in the Attic Mysteries and of which Cicero speaks, only have this philosophical ring to them in the Latin rendering. If we look at Pindar’s original version, we no longer think of ‘principles’. ‘Happy is he,’ says the Greek poet, ‘who, as soon as he had beheld that, was buried: he knows the end of life and also knows the beginning given by Zeus (οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν, οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν)’.16 This refers to the beginning of life itself, and not to the ‘origin’ conceived philosophically – even if in Greek it is also called ἀρχή – but to the natural way in which life is formed, towards which, not in vain, the Mysteria lead us back at night.

The nocturnal is not limited to the veiling of the Myste at the very moment of entry. The Mysteria were of such an essential nocturnal nature that within them all aspects of the night could be experienced, including that faculty which

had been granted to it uniquely and exclusively to, in a sense, give birth and thus help it to be illuminated. These were not merely nocturnal celebrations, but they even represented – or so it seems – the advance of the night towards the sudden great illumination in the dead of night.

It was no coincidence that the great Mysteries took place during the waning moon. Indeed, although the preparations were organised during the full moon—when the Mystes gathered on the 15th of Boedromion—the prevailing atmosphere was already that of the waning moon, and on the 16th they took a bath in the sea, which was likewise a preparatory and purifying rite. It was not until the 19th that they set out on their journey, and on the 20th, the day of their arrival in Eleusis, the series of sacred nights began. It is possible17 that the Lesser Mysteries of Anthesterion lasted for roughly the same number of nights. The Mysteries, as a festival of 'closing and entering', in a sense constituted the opposite of the celebration of the month that gave its name to the Anthesteria, and in turn marked the beginning of the full moon phase from the 11th to the 13th. The 'blooming' that gives this festival its name also represented an 'opening' in general: not only the opening of flowers and the moonlight, but also of the wine craters, and even of the tombs. And of the flowers closing, of which, on the other hand, the same is said as when the eyes close (μύειν).18 Mysteria, the name of the celebration, also has another which, by contrast, is linguistically clearer, more certain and complementary: Anakalypteria. The covering in the Mysteria and the uncovering (ἀναϰαλύπτειν) in the Anakalypteria belong to a higher union known as a sacred act of higher mythology, and has since been recognised in its human repetitions. The name of the celebration, Anakalypteria, has been handed down to us through the cult of the very goddess to whom the Mysteria are offered: Persephone. It refers to her wedding, which was also celebrated under the name Theogamia, or 'divine nuptials'.19 Both names were commonly used in Sicily, but the divine event they herald can only be that whose mythological content was shaped by the Attic Mysteries. The wedding of Persephone and Hades likewise represented an archetypal image of human marriages. Just as in antiquity brides were veiled before being handed over to their grooms, so too were the blessed ones of the underworld handed over to death: by veiling the Myste. Among men, however, neither the Myste nor the bride are those for whom this sign and this form of withdrawal into the night are imbued with meaning,

just as it had been for that goddess who had endured courtship as a form of death and was consigned to the god of the underworld. To proceed with the nuptial unveiling, the prerequisite was to arrive veiled at that wedding: Persephone's entry into the underworld night of the bridegroom who both slays and begets. As a celebration, it has a name: Mysteria.

It is the triple darkness—that of veiling, that of the sacred nights at Agra and Eleusis, and that of one's own inner darkness—in which the Myste, as well as the man and not only the initiated woman, is reunited with her own suffering and conceiving motherhood. Whilst admiring the eternal and universal nature of the beginning of their lives, they contemplate the original image of that unique marital union, which was their origin, in the divine figures and destinies: something unutterable that, in late Antiquity, could no longer occur. The Attic Mysteries, through their mythological imagery, still readily evoke experiences, a return of man and a rediscovery of the natural roots of his existence. No particularly powerful resources were needed to access the realm where those roots lay, a field of energy not yet exhausted, in which one feels firmly rooted like a god: the festival itself, with its spontaneous atmospheric miracles, linked to one's own ancestry, was enough to reach the deepest sources of birth and the world of the ancestors. The existence of what has been, which the soul guards as its most precious treasure, proves effective and powerful. Christianity, with a deep mistrust not without reason, consciously went beyond that realm of roots and sources, of those forces which the Mysteria, in their own way, knew how to tame and master (in the second part of our reflections we shall continue to refer to this). The Mysteries of Christianity itself, and above all its sacraments, were destined to become new and even more powerful means of fostering the rooting of humanity in a supernatural and entirely different primordial essence.

With the growing importance of miraculous means – magical among the pagans and entirely new in Christianity, essentially through the sacraments – the Mysterion (in the singular) increasingly comes to the fore. Just as Phylakterion (from φυλάττειν 'to protect') is the 'means of protection', Mysterion, by grammatical logic, should mean the
'a means of concealment, of hiding, of maintaining secrecy'. However, that which has been kept secret—the secret itself—

sums up the entire secret cult – undoubtedly a later development –20 signifies the content of the Mysteria. This is also consistent when it is presented as a festival and an exemplary secret cult: everything it encompassed was a Mysterion, a means of celebrating the festival and, at the same time, a complete celebration, concealed and kept secret. Ultimately, however, all of that merely represented the means of entering into something tangible that lay beyond the requirements of the cult, of objects, of actions and words. Regarding the climax of the Eleusinian procession – when an ear of corn is silently displayed or those simple words ὗε κύε, 'rain, bring forth fruit', are uttered – Christian writers make mocking remarks: 'This is the great and unnameable Mysterion of Eleusis!'.21 They take delight in listing the unworthy objects of veneration, common objects that were supposed to constitute the Mysterion. And they demonstrate that the pagan Arreton, insofar as this characteristic is concerned, has vanished for them. Their Mysteria are fundamentally different from those of the pagans.

2. THE FOUNDING MYTH OF THE CABIRIC SANCTUARY OF THEBES

An analysis of the word ‘Mysterion’, and the meaning of its original and undoubtedly plural usage, as in ‘Mysteria’, should have preceded both the general reflection on the ancient mysteries and the specific mysteries of the Cabiri. Our focus is now on the latter, though we do not intend to offer an exhaustive interpretation of the enigmatic mythological creatures known as the Kabeiroi (Κάβειροι) – or, as they were known at the sanctuary of Thebes, in the Boeotian dialect, Kabeiroi (Κάβιροι) – nor is this an attempt to describe the secret cult that Herodotus already referred to as the Mysteries of the Cabiri. This mention is even considered the earliest reference to the Greek Mysteries in literature, disregarding the inscriptions referring to the great celebrations at Eleusis.22 Nevertheless, we know that Herodotus uses this expression in a general sense, the same sense in which we refer to the ancient mysteries. Although, on the other hand, and for reasons of content, the analysis of certain accounts relating to the cult of the Cabiri, as is the case with the analysis of the words, must likewise be placed at the beginning of a scientific study of the mysteries. These are the reasons why this reflection is devoted to a myth that has been preserved and is connected with the Cabirian sanctuary at Thebes.

Certainly, we can do so if we return to a more general use of the word, and instead of ‘Mysteria’ speak more freely of ‘mysteries’, without, however, entirely forgetting the festive context in which its original meaning was revealed to us. This context was that of a wedding represented and experienced mythologically, the original wedding of a divine bride and a divine groom, in whose imitation and image human weddings are celebrated. In this context, the veiling and unveiling formed the phase preceding the Anakalypteria: that which, amongst the wedding preparations, must be regarded as the special act of preparation. The nuptial event itself does not lose its natural character through this act. The assertion of the Greeks that the marital union

represented the fulfilment and culmination of an initiation (τέλος ὁ γάμος)23 rested precisely on the idea that the celebration of the mysteries and the celebration of the wedding were merely variations on the same underlying theme, whereby the man of antiquity was required, above all, to act as the guarantor of the succession of his family and his lineage.

But it is precisely the ritual enactment of this entirely natural event—be it as a public family celebration or as a secret rite of the Greek lineages, not to mention the most sublime and grandiose organisation of the Eleusinian Mysteries—that very ritual act fashioned from the raw material of life, which reveals the animal-natural elevated to a supreme level. The animal in the nuptial union, at that level of supreme human-natural elevation, attained in a certain sense something metaphysical: the boundless backdrop of the roots from which the individual's life emerged. Nevertheless, animal life, in the great cycles of nature, always had something ephemeral about all its acts and, in a way, appeared only as a flash hic et nunc, here and now, without possessing a conscious link to what preceded or followed it. The periodic, conscious repetition of cultic acts, their ritual form fixed and repeated in a constant manner, the shaping of all weddings into a series of linked generations, creates precisely that union with the world of the ancestors, of the roots, or whatever one wishes to call that which has repeatedly existed in the soul: the special way of connecting with and forming part of the fabric of the world that characterises humankind.

Thus, in a special way, it seems that the preparatory phase of the nuptial union—the act of covering—in this natural event that has become a cultural one, goes beyond the merely animal. The bride's flight, the act of her being caught and forced, all the stages of the bride's abduction itself, as if it were a mirror image, correspond to all the moments of the preparatory courtship rituals of certain animals during their mating. Only the envelopment in darkness finds its ultimate example in the heavens, where the sun and moon disappear into the darkness during the period of their conjunction, which corresponds to the fading of what is hidden into its own darkness—an event which, moreover, is not a mere imitation, but also an inward turn possessing a meaning and a unique spiritual reality. And it is precisely this preparatory event that gave the mysteries their name; it is

distinctive and specific in its two qualities of antiquity and mysticism: on the one hand, the preparation for initiation, and on the other, the guidance towards the outside world, both in the sense of elevation and of deeper rootedness. When we turn to analysing a particularly instructive account of the cult of the Cabiri in the ancient mysteries, we must not overlook its specific nature.

The Greeks considered the mysteries of the Cabiri to be very ancient and, even in historical times, also very archaic. Their main stronghold on Samothrace, the island in northern Greece off the Thracian coast, was so far removed from the places brimming with signs of the classical Homeric religion of the Hellenic world that, there and on the neighbouring islands of the Thracian Sea, the survival of these cultic customs and practices should come as no surprise. This situation, moreover, explains why the information regarding these original features, characteristic of the religion of that island, dates from a relatively late period, beginning in the Hellenic era, when Samothrace already belonged to the inner circle of the Hellenised world around the Aegean Sea. Not even the excavations of the Samothracian Mystery Sanctuary have managed to go substantially beyond the Hellenic and Roman monuments – at least to date – to bring to light direct evidence of an authentic and very ancient stratum of the cult of the Cabiri. This is why we do not now focus on the place of worship on Samothrace itself, but on another site that was excavated in Greece in 1888–89, and whose remains were not comprehensively presented until 1940.24

But first we must mention two accounts from Samothrace which, although dating from a later period, attest to the ancient and immediate origins of this cult. One account is found in Diodorus, the Greek universal historian, when he states that the island's natives – whether in his own time or that of his source, in any case during the Hellenic period –25 possessed an ancient and strange language of their own, much of which has been preserved as a cultic language. Inscriptions found on the neighbouring island of Lemnos, also a site of Cabirian worship, give us an idea of this non-Greek indigenous language, which appears to be related to the Etruscan language, with which it is closely associated, and which was regarded by the Greeks as the language of the Pelasgians or Tyrrhenians. The name of the Cabirian priest of Samothrace, Koes (κόης , or κοίης), was recently found on monuments in an

ancient language of Asia Minor, Lydian, again as kavés.26 These were the vestiges of a barbarian language, from the Greek perspective, which was used in the cults of Samothrace, and surely also in those of the Cabiri.

The other account is a historical anecdote with two versions, each relating to a different person.27 According to one version, the priest, Koes, put a preliminary question to the Spartan strategist Antalcidas, who wished to be initiated into the mysteries of Samothrace: 'What misdeed had he committed in his life that was more heinous than any ordinary crime?'.28 The Spartan answered this question with a truly Hellenic attitude: 'If I had committed anything of the sort, the gods themselves would know!' Another famous Spartan, according to the other version, the general Lysander, wished to consult the oracle at Samothrace – a version which, as we can see, is not credible, since we have no reliable reference to the existence of a site for the oracle at Samothrace. However, in both this version and the other, which is not much more credible, the significance of the question posed at Samothrace – and which to a Greek must have seemed as unworthy as a lack of piety – is that Lysander replied to the priest with another question:
'Who wants to know, you or the gods?' And when he receives the reply:
'The gods', he dismisses the priest with the words: 'Get out of my way, then; I will answer them if they wish to know!'

However, even more significant than the anecdote about Antalcidas is the very nature of the Samothracian question: the person questioned was required to answer by naming what, in his view, had been the most serious offence committed against divine law during his lifetime.29 A question of this nature – so striking to the Greek world that it even gave rise to anecdotes – represented something more, something more special than a mere general exhortation to confess one's sins. He who sought initiation had to expose himself as a sacrilegious transgressor against the divine order, so that he might then be purified of his sins by the Koes. But he had to be a sacrilegious person, because the original initiates from Samothrace, the original archetypes of all subsequent Cabirian Mystes, were in their origin just as sacrilegious as the Cabiri themselves. Let us now briefly recall two further indications. According to a tradition from Thessalonica, the great coastal city situated opposite Samothrace, two Cabirian brothers

are said to have beaten a third brother to death, whose head was hidden and covered with a cloth as red as blood.30 And on Imbros, an island situated in the same region, the names of the Titans—the well-known original transgressors of Greek mythology—are listed in an invocation of the Cabiri.31

A comparison of the significance of these two features – the use of a pre-Greek barbaric language in the ritual and the prerequisite of a grave transgression in the candidate's previous life – clarifies the two basic requirements of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Greek language and the purity of having committed no bloody misdeed were indispensable conditions for obtaining permission to participate in the processions held in secret during the great celebration. The Lesser Mysteries also purified the Mystes – whenever necessary – of blood crimes committed previously. However, a general purification was not enough to emphasise the misdeed of the one to be initiated! This emphasis was lacking in Eleusis just as much as the very absence of any memory of a pre-Greek past of the cult. Which did not mean the absence of a pre-Greek history! The explicit rejection of men who spoke a barbarian tongue, this astonishing element of the 'preamble' to the Prorrhesis of the priest of the mysteries, almost leads us to conclude that the great festival of Eleusis was intended to be presented as a purely Hellenic construct, because it had been consciously erected upon different foundations. Set against such an emphasis on the Hellenic, now purified, are the vestiges of barbarian languages and the religious appropriation of the impure, the ancient and primordial, and the pre-Greek elements in the mysteries of the Cabiri, even when these testimonies date from a later period. This could only confirm a staggered sequence of origins rather than an actual chronology: the mysteries of the Cabiri seem to us more primordial than the Eleusinian mysteries of any period to which we have access. Logically, they predate the latter, as can be deduced from the characteristics we have just indicated. When Herodotus, the first to speak of the mysteries of Samothrace, attributes them to that original people—whom he calls Pelasgians, in accordance with a widespread tradition in ancient Greece, and who, in his own words, had also previously settled in Attica—this serves as a welcome confirmation for us. According to another historian,[32] they had arrived at that place from Boeotia, from the region of Thebes. We do not believe that in the

It is essential to be able to refute the truth of these accounts by ancient historians, and the task of science is to interpret them. Nevertheless, our interpretations will remain primarily within the field of the history of religion, drawing on the religious documents and monuments associated with the Cabirian sanctuary at Thebes, which are provided to us in abundance and, in part – particularly as regards the archaeological material – date from a period earlier than Samothrace itself.

When we leave Thebes via the road leading to Livadhiá (the ancient city of Lebadeia) to reach the nearby Cabirian sanctuary, heading north, we first arrive at the plateau which in antiquity was called the Aonic (Ἀόνιον πεδίον).33 Whether this geographical name is translated as ‘plateau of the dawn light’ or as ‘plateau of the people of the early light’, in any case it derives from Eos, the morning light.34 We must bear this in mind, since Samothrace, the island of the Cabiri, was also known by two other special names that had a similar meaning: it was called Leucania, the island of the early white light,35 and the island of Electra, who was likewise a goddess of sunlight.36 The area bordering that darker corner of the mountain, where the Cabirian mysteries of Thebes were celebrated, was also the sacred light of the rising sun. Heading west, we left the Aonian plateau to enter the sanctuary of the Cabiri, and chose Pausanias as our Greek guide and conductor, whose topographical descriptions have been precisely located and confirmed by excavations.37

At the point where the path branches off towards the rediscovered and unearthed Cabirian sanctuary, there once stood, in ancient times, the sacred grove of Demeter Kabeiria and her daughter: ‘Only the initiated may enter,’ adds Pausanias. ‘The Cabirian sanctuary lies at a distance of roughly seven stadia from this grove. Who the Cabiri are, and what the sacred rites are for them and for the Mother, is something on which I shall not venture an opinion: those who would like to hear it must forgive me. However, nothing prevents me from revealing what the Thebans recount concerning the origin of those rites.” We can see that we have now entered the precinct of that which is kept secret by the fork in the path, in the grove of Demeter. To her belong not only certain places, such as the grove itself, and not only the sacred rites, which are named both in relation to the Cabiri and in relation to

Demeter and Persephone: that is to say, Dromena or Telete and Orgia. This last word, ὄργια, is conceived as an allusion to the mysteries in its basic meaning as 'action' par excellence, although it acquires a special conciseness, also as 'act' or 'deed' (ἔργον), which are used with identical specificity, and assign a name to the bloody act of sacrifice.38 Not only is the cult of secrecy itself kept secret, but also the nature of the Cabiri, that is, the entire mythology that expresses this nature. Instead, Pausanias is permitted to explain the pseudo-history of the founding myth of the Cabiri mysteries.

Although in this discussion we wish to confine ourselves to the analysis and interpretation of the founding myth and its variants, we must nevertheless mention certain characteristics attributed to the Cabiri, which, by virtue of the complete transmission of the tradition, appear to be well-established. Above all, they are and remain deities who are kept in secret. The fact that those in peril at sea sought help from them specifically facilitates an explanation of their very nature. But it is not fair to say that, simply because they were called upon to help, they should be conceived of as helper deities par excellence. They are precisely – and this is the only general conclusion that the tradition allows – deities of the mysteries par excellence. The name by which they are known is a word unknown in Greek. It was believed that this was merely the Hellenised form of the Semitic Kabirim, 'the great ones', because the Greeks often referred to the Cabiri as 'great gods' (Μεγάλοι θεοί). A general designation such as this belongs precisely to the deities of the mysteries, and it matters not that it has no linguistic basis in the very names of the gods in question, nor is it the product of translation. Indeed, the original meaning of the word Kabeiroi is unknown, and it may be assumed that it is suited both to the invocation of the 'great gods' and to the deities of the mysteries.

Although the meaning of the name is unknown, its phonetic form with its variants – in addition to the feminine Kabeira, also Kaeira and Kapheira –39 does not suggest a Semitic religion, but rather points in the same direction as the foreign word Koes: towards the realm of the ancient Mediterranean cults, which were partly preserved in the religions of Asia Minor. The name Kabeiros is associated with a mountain or a landscape

the mountainous region of Phrygia, and is also a domain of the Great Mother of the Gods known by the name of Berekyntia.40 The most striking aspect of the entire tradition of the Cabiri – apart from their status as deities of the mysteries – is their place within the vast circle of deities and servants of the distinctly masculine goddesses: the Curetes, Coribantes, and Idaioi dactyloi, who make up the followers of the Great Mother.41 These phallic daimones, closely linked to Berekyntia, were also known in Asia Minor as Berekyndai, and were regarded as the spirits of the most primitive cult instruments, the bramaderas,42 which we know from ethnology. The swarm that emerges accompanying the Great Mother of Asia Minor under various names – essentially no different from those of the Cabiri – must be imagined as ghostly and jubilantly ready to procreate.

When divine beings, such as the Cabiri, appear as ‘smaller than the small and greater than the great’ – to use an expression from the Upanishads – this is a phantasmal characteristic. The very same inscription from Imbros, which in its list of the Cabiri mentions great Titans – Ceo, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus – specifically names the Pataeikoi: that is to say, the dwarves. Even if one wishes to see this unusual list as the result of a later syncretism, it could not have been viewed in this way had the Cabiri not been regarded as both titanic and dwarven. We already know that they were also sacrilegious: their fratricide is no less titanic than the murder of Dionysus by the Titans. And in the founding myth we can see how Prometheus maintains a relationship with the Cabiri men similar to the one he had maintained in high mythology with the great Titans. For a proper understanding of that myth, we must pay close attention to the following: what is narrated there by men in a pseudo-historical manner for the uninitiated ultimately depends on those mythological figures kept secret, whose ghostly features should strike us as both titanic-gigantic and dwarf-ghostly, though always markedly masculine.

At the site of the sanctuary of the Cabiri – as we read in Pausanias’s version of the founding myth – there once stood a city, and the men who lived there were called Cabiri. Demeter appeared before Prometheus, one of those Cabiri (Καβειραῖοι), and his son Aitnaios, bearing something

took it with him and gave it to him to keep. But Pausanias realised that he could not reveal what it was or what could be done with it. It was enough to know that the secret cult – the Telete – represented a gift from Demeter to the Cabiri. It hardly needs pointing out how superficially the Cabiri had here become Cabiri men. Aitnaios, Aetnaeus, is a transparent pseudonym for Hephaestus, the god of fire and the forge, whose membership of the divine Cabiri is also expressed through the fact that at one time he was certainly called Hephaisten (Ἥφαιστοι).43 The essential point, that which history seeks to preserve, was already demonstrated by the location of the sanctuaries: Demeter, in her association with the Cabiri, called by them Kabeiria or simply the Mother, must be regarded as the founder of the Cabirian mysteries.44

The other version of the same myth is recounted by Pausanias as if it were a later event in the history of the city of Cabira – after it had been abandoned – or of the region. In other words, when the Kabeiraioi were forced to flee, as the story goes, in the face of the advancing Argive conquerors, the secret cult also temporarily ceased. It was Pelarge, the daughter of Potnieus, and her husband Isthmiades who revived the secret cult from the outset, but in another place called Alexiarus. However, because Pelarge had performed the initiation outside the former borders, later, following the return of the survivors of the Cabirian lineage (γένος Καβειρῖτῶν), the cult had to be re-established in the relevant land.45 An oracle from Dodona ensured that Pelarge received cultic veneration and a pregnant animal as an offering. The founder of the mysteries is therefore once again a goddess, and there can be no doubt regarding the goddess bearing the name Pelarge. That the daughter of the ‘man of Potniai’ (Ποτνιεύς) was linked to the cult of Demeter in Potniai is, at the very least, what must be immediately recognised.46 Potniai was a city of Demeter in Boeotia, and was so named after her, after Potnia. If the name Aitnaios points to Hephaistos, so too does Isthmiades allude to the great god of the Isthmus, to Poseidon: he was – as Potidas – ‘the man of Demeter’. And a pregnant animal – a sow – was received as an offering by no other woman but Demeter.

Thus do the coded tales, which, like these founding myths, are easily recognisable to the initiated, go. And we might immediately ask the question that arises from their unambiguous meaning: what

What significance might it have that Demeter, the ‘Mother’, is the goddess who initiates the mysteries of the Cabiri? But first we must ask ourselves: is this role of a goddess in a secret cult—one which, moreover, is characterised by male deities—ancient enough for us to discern a deeper meaning in it? Is any one feature of the founding myths sufficiently ancient and primitive to allow us to appreciate the great antiquity of the connection between the Cabiri and Demeter? And in asking this question, we turn our attention to a feature of the myth which, as soon as the interpretation is presented, might remain equally enigmatic: the only name that remains obscure to us is Pelarge. We readily recognise the goddess to whom the pseudonym belongs, but it is unlikely that this is through the name itself. Was it not clearer to the initiates of the secret cult than it is to us? What sort of memories and images did this name evoke in them?

Pelarge is the feminine form of Pelargos, ‘the stork’. If we were not to confine ourselves strictly to that imagery which can be verifiably deduced from the ancient religious content, we would find ourselves faced with traces of a reference closely linked to a widespread popular explanation of the origin of life. There exists a mythology of the stork, whose traces, based on a secret cult linked to the origin of life, would not surprise the modern man. But there is no need for us to beat about the bush by listing relevant archetypal psychological images (such as, for example, the stork as the mythological bearer of children), for the richness of what has been transmitted directly from Greece itself is greater than anything that might have been imagined through our own interpretation of the myths – be it romantic or psychological. Nevertheless, at the same time we must also consider the possibilities hidden behind the flexible dialectal forms, which from time to time and deliberately occur in the intermingled life of the Greek language. Thus, Pelarge as a translation of Pelasge may correspond to another dialect and may even be related to the ethnonym Pelasgians. The sequence of phonemes –rg– corresponds exactly to an older sequence –sg–47 and yet does not represent any modification of this kind, which would render an evocation impossible: the evocation of the Pelasgians’ way of being through the name Pelarge.

We are aware of a tradition that links Demeter, as the founder of the mysteries, with the representative of that enigmatic early people who gave their name to the Pelasgians.48 The Argive tradition associated the founding of the mysteries of Demeter primarily with the landscape stretching between the city of Argos and Lerna, a prominent site for the celebration of mysteries. In her search for her stolen daughter, Demeter is said not to have gone to the king of Eleusis, but rather to have stayed at the home of a native of those parts, and there to have founded her mysteries. According to one account, Demeter's host, to whom she bestowed the secret cult, was named Pelasgos.49 And it was he who founded a temple in honour of the goddess opposite the city of Argos, where she was worshipped as Demeter Pelasgis. The founder of the mysteries was also known as Pelasgerina, which is why she was called Pelasgis, and not Pelarge. And this latter name, even when it is merely a nickname for Pelasgerina, evokes the stork.

However, there is another possible point to bear in mind here. From a purely linguistic perspective, Pelargos, 'the stork', could be a later form of Pelasgos, a word that originally would not have referred to human beings but to birds. If all the men of a tribe, through initiation rites, were identified with animals – and in this case with storks, through a divine stork-woman – such a role would fall entirely within the scope of primitive secret cults. This identification might also have been achieved as an ethnic name. Thus the Pelasgoi – wherever they appeared in the legendary prehistory of Greece, be it in Argos, Attica, Boeotia or Samothrace, to name only those places whose mysteries have been mentioned – would be the initiates of primitive secret cults, and perhaps even members of men's societies which, as is well known, appear in ethnology to be linked to secret cults. In this case, the ethnonym would have diverged from the original, the merely dialectally distinct animal name Pelargos, and would have lost its primitive meaning. However, we shall not concern ourselves with the still highly problematic nature of the Pelasgians, but rather the reverse: we shall attempt to imagine and interpret what the Greeks constructed on a probable ethnological basis, but which is only recognisable in broad strokes. The crowning achievement of this construct, undoubtedly the purest Greek form of secret cults, is represented by the Eleusinian Mysteries. That the figure of the priest

It is all the more remarkable that the initiator should have retained in Eleusis something akin to a distant memory, to a former association with a bird. The initiating priests and priestesses, the hierophants of Eleusis, belonged to the lineage of the chief priest of the mysteries of Eumolpos, and were regarded as his successors: the Eumolpidai. And, to be even more precise, they were all Eumolpoi: just like their mythical ancestor.50 For Eumolpos is precisely the name of the office; the moment the Eumolpids took up the office of Eumolpos, they lost their own name.51 The word Eumolpos, however, did not designate the office-holder as the 'priest' – who in Eleusis was called 'hierophant' – but as the 'good singer'. The meaning is very clear, but it seems rather inappropriate to refer to the role of the Eleusinian priesthood. The hierophant had something to offer primarily to the eyes and not to the ear. This is what his name indicates: 'he who reveals the sacred (which is kept secret)'. His beautiful voice resounded powerfully when he summoned the Mystes or announced the birth of the divine child. But from all we know about the mystery ceremonies, we cannot quite picture him as a 'singer'.

Nevertheless, the name Eumolpos certainly captured something of the essence of the original priest of the mysteries. In an image on a famous 5th-century vase, Eumolpos – depicted at the farewell to Triptolemus in the company of the gods of Eleusis – has a swan beside him as an attribute,52 and the Greeks, although it seems the swan only sang in its final hour, regarded it as a fine singer among birds. The entire history of the mythological lineage of the primordial priest, which later mythographers fragmented amongst various Eumolpoi,53 is better suited to the nature of swans. He may have arrived in Eleusis from Thrace: which was generally a cause for scandal, since the Thracians were regarded as barbarians, and barbarians were excluded from the mysteries. For the Greeks, however, Thrace, and especially the mouth of the Strymon River, was regarded as the homeland of swans. There, even in historical times, people were given such names, such as the Pelasgians, a name derived from the stork or the swan. Famous Athenians were related to a Thracian king named Oloros, 'the swan'.54 The mother of the mythical Eumolpus was called Chione, 'white snow', who was a daughter of Boreas, the Thracian north wind, and of Oritia, whom he had abducted from the square where the mystery plays were performed

Agrai, by the River Ilissos.55 It was said that Eumolpus's Thracian companions had drowned whilst bathing in Lake Eschatiotis – that is, in the waters of the very edge of the world.56 It strikes us as though it were a fable featuring swans. The proper names of the priest or priestess, according to the Eleusinian funerary poems, also vanished into those deep waters;57 they emerged from the water as new, sacred beings, retaining no name other than that which was precisely fitting for the swan, for the fine singer.

The father of the 'good singer', the husband of the snow-white maiden, of Chione, was the god who was worshipped in Eleusis as 'the Father'[58] and was regarded as the quintessential husband of Demeter: Poseidon. In a theriomorphic conception of that wedding involving the abduction of the maiden, which forms the mythological basis of the Demeter mysteries, he takes the form of a horse to play the role of the groom.59 In another version of the same wedding featuring more animals, the groom appears in the form of a swan and the bride in that of a goose. In the poetic elaboration of this primordial mythological wedding scene, he is called Zeus and she Nemesis.60 Nevertheless, the original event appears to be the primordial scene, which was only later elevated to epic mythology through the names of Zeus and Nemesis. In the mythology of the mysteries, it appears to be Demeter's own daughter who takes the place of the bride in the wedding of the swans. In Eleusis, only the priests and priestesses were regarded as successors to the inhabitants of the air and water, the deities of the winds and the sea, and particularly the fine singer, who resembled the swan: the marshy original setting of the birds, and that of all the events of the mysteries, has in some way been lost. In Boeotia, a memory of this was still preserved in Persephone herself: there was talk of her playing with a goose in a cave near Lebadeia,61 where – as in so many other similar places – she was abducted. And this form of the mythological motif is reflected in a vase from nearby Cabirion – in the Cabirian sanctuary at Thebes – where, beside each of the goddesses searching for the one who has been abducted, alongside Demeter and the winged Hecate Angelos, a waterbird can be seen.62

The swan, the goose, and undoubtedly the duck too—so frequently depicted on Greek vases—form a group of waterfowl, in which—as if they were a single fabric, in which the

the peculiarities of those animals – in archaic times, the mythology of the Divine Mother and her daughter was represented, in which the destinies of women, the soul and human beings were formulated. The characterisation—which is crystal clear to the initiated—of the Mother Goddess herself, the founder of the mysteries of the Cabiri of Thebes, as a stork-woman, is no less archaic and, alongside the group of short-legged birds, points to another with long legs. Thus, the stork, the heron and the crane form part of the same group as the swan, the goose and the duck, and in the images on the vases they are depicted with vague drawings in which one cannot distinguish one from the other. There are even transitions from one group to another and, based on the material we have so far, no one can say that in the image – the interpretation of which will bring our reflections to a close – of that vase from the Cabirion in Thebes, the distinction between the two birds – one with long legs and the other with short ones – is accidental or intentional.

We need only take a brief look at the finds from the sanctuary at Thebes to answer the question regarding the significance of Demeter's role as founder. We can already consider the preliminary question regarding the antiquity of this role to have been resolved. The designation of the founder of the secret cult as Pelarge stimulates the most ancient imaginations, and these are likewise reflected in the findings which, at the very least, take us back to the Classical period. The oldest stone temple to have been excavated was built in the 6th century BC, or at the latest in the early 5th century.63 An ancient site for initiation, a Telesterion, called 'Alexiarus', which may not yet have been built of stone, was located, as can be deduced from the texts of Pausanias, outside the boundaries of the historic stone sanctuary. A second stone temple was built in the 5th century on the site of the first, which had been destroyed by the Persians and subsequently rebuilt, and a third in the late 4th century, after the second had fallen victim to the ravages of the Macedonians. The main body of the finds – those of interest to us here – consists of vases and cups bearing characteristic depictions, both in terms of subject matter, which includes decorative elements, and in terms of concept, owing to a stylisation bordering on the grotesque or even exceeding it. The most significant group was created, at the latest, in the second half of the 5th century; and the representative treasure of the images on the vessels—the birds of the

The swamps – both those with short and long legs – that form part of that treasure are the heirs to an archaic tradition.64

The reference in the images on the vases to the content of the secret cult, like the reference in the texts, can also take two forms. There are immediate, mythological elaborations on the theme of the mysteries, and there are also coded narratives, whose meanings are sufficiently clear to the initiated, but which to the uninitiated appear as mere fables or simple scenes pertaining to the human race. The legend of Pelarge and the scenes of the marsh birds, reflected in the images on the Cabirion vases, belong to one level. Mythological texts, belonging to the first group, were certainly kept secret as far as possible. Thus, a mythological scene with inscriptions is all the more valuable if it survives on one of the fragments that have become famous.65 It has often been discussed,66 and later—though not in the present discussion—it will need to be interpreted anew, and in an exhaustive manner. For now, we shall merely mention the essentials of what we have been able to ascertain. The gigantic figure of the god, resembling the archaic figure of Dionysus, who in that representation goes by the name of Kabiros, shows that the virility inherent in the role of a divine father – for this is what this god Kabiros represents with his son, Pais, before him – was elevated to the highest conceivable dignity through the secret cult founded by a goddess. However, the line of life, the origin emanating from him through Pais, comes to become a grotesque primordial being, the primitive Cabirian man, a spirit yet to be born: Pratolaos. But the bride – that of the original betrothed, Mito (‘the seed’), equally grotesque and wild in appearance – that woman who will give birth to the life emanating from the jar of Father Kabiros’s mixtures, will be distinguished by her beauty and by her significant name, Crateia (‘the strong one’).

The second group, that of fables and which is generic to the images on the vessels, comprises above all the depictions of the people of the fable, that of the pygmies with the cranes.67 Through the figures of the ridiculous and phallic dwarves, the pygmies, and the sublime and imposing celestial birds, the cranes, the contrast between the male initiate and the female initiator is signified, which seems to represent a characteristic of these mysteries. In secret cults throughout the world, the initiate is forced to face unpleasant situations in which he is mistreated and ridiculed.

He also defends himself; but when he surrenders, his failure is only apparent, for what follows is elevation. This seems to have been the situation of the initiates in the mysteries, and in this too the essence of the Cabiri was already revealed: the polar opposite of the paternal dignity of the origin of life, the ridiculous debauchery and at the same time the clumsiness of the phallic. It is something wild and grotesque, which can also prove deadly, just as the fighting spirit and greed of the pygmies can be, as they devour the beautiful birds they have hunted. In the presence of such creatures, the celestial aspect of the essence of the marsh birds is expressed even more powerfully. The waterfowl in the Cabirion vases, in general, do not evoke in us the idea of an indolent, lowly matter, which is only surpassed by the masculine, but rather the opposite: the dwarfish, the earthly, the rough and savage virility might have been elevated to more prominent realms through a winged femininity.68

And here we can also answer, albeit in a brief and provisional manner, the question regarding the role of the founder, Demeter, in the Cabirian mysteries. The interpretation of a particular group of fables and generic images – specifically the initiatory scenes, presented in such a way that, in a sense, they incorporate only the comic, but not the sacred – will also be included in a specific later discussion. We shall merely mention, once again and briefly, that among those scenes the nuptial element is not absent either: a bride shrouded in the deepest veiling, with a crown upon her head, with two special twigs, a cultic feature alongside the crown.69 In another image, the groom of a Dionysian mystery wedding is depicted; this, however, takes place in the same setting, that is, surely in the same Cabirian sanctuary, and in it he is characterised by two similar twigs.70 In Greek, this type of bouquet is called Bakchos (βάκχος), and the correct translation is
'shoot' or 'little sprout', also in the sense of a fragile creature, almost a
plant still, born of that nuptial union. This is why Dionysus, the most fragile, the divine child born prematurely, is also Bakchos.71

Among all the symbolic objects that the initiates carry in the images on the Cabirion vessels, we find this shoot, which is also depicted on its own: most often with two water birds beside it, in a recurring motif, but linked to the scene of

a sort of fable.72 On a bowl, which on its opposite side shows only a sprig of myrtle, the scene is depicted—that of the sapling between two marsh birds—in which it is still flanked by two strange fable animals. These are stylised roosters to which archaic Greek art has given the form of a fantastical bird, and it is reasonable to assume they originate from the East. As roosters and as fantastical birds, they express the dawning of the morning hour which, so to speak, takes place under their watch and protection, and the presence of both birds serves to designate such important mythological sites as Leucania and the island of Electra, in Samothrace, as well as that of Aonia, the 'morning' plateau preceding the Cabirian sanctuary of Thebes.

And so, in the imagery of a fable, we can see the meaning of the founding myth: the secret cult which, for those in the know, was the creation of a primal femininity, represented by a 'stork-woman' goddess, who devoted her maternal care to the offspring – the rising sun within a human body – whilst the creation of life was underway. Masculinity, especially that of the young man who acts with brusqueness, places in the foreground the aspect most eager to attack and destroy; and only in the background, in a sense, the man who is also fertile. Both in the foreground, in the visible and tangible events, and in the background, in a secret and inner process, the fertility of women takes precedence above all else. The path towards that background, towards that which, in its union with all the roots of our being, was to initiate, in some way, the metaphysical becoming, was a task reserved for woman. It was she who elevated the man who spread death, the warrior, towards the role of dignity and awareness of the origin of life. Perhaps the name of the place of the Pelarge's initiation, Alexiarus, 'the defender of the god of war', might also indicate this. The original images of the men who were to be initiated, the Cabiri, likewise possessed something of the murderer, something which, as in all warriors, had to be atoned for. They were, however, also spirits of life, who in their original mode of expression still stirred the bellows to make the rhomboi73 hum and, according to a later expression, waved like nourishing breezes for the souls,74 and brought fertility to women. The transformation of men into true fountains of life, in the service of the most fragile of living beings, of man in his seed, their guidance towards a form of humanity, perhaps the earliest and,

certainly, in its simplest form: such might have been, according to the analysis of the founding myth, the meaning of the mysteries of the Cabiri.75

NOTES

1.

K. Kerényi, Humanistische Seelensforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 120–159; ‘Hermes, the Conductor of Souls’, Part II of this book; Vater Helios (Eranos-Jahrbuch, 1943) and ‘Töchter der Sonne’, Zurich, 1944, and Stuttgart, 1997.

2.

Enn. VI 9, II; cf. K. Kerényi, ‘Der grosse Daimon des Symposion’, in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 226–242; that lecture in Basel on 4 March 1942 was a preliminary study on the subject of ‘Antike Mysterien’; this Eranos lecture of 3 August 1944 concerns two others that form part of my treatise on the Eleusinian Mysteries, in C. G. Jung/Karl Kerényi, Einfürhrung in das Wesen der Mythologie, Hildesheim, 1980, pp. 196–221 [Spanish edition available: Introducción a la esencia de la mitología, Siruela, Madrid, 2004].

3.

In L. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, Berlin, 1932, the *Mysteria* appear among the festivals only in the indicative mood, with the German ending *Mysterien*: an indication of how the customary modernisation was emphasised. That the word Μυστήρια, including in its syntax, is treated like temporal expressions and proper nouns, specifically as names of festivals, has long been known: cf. H. Sauppe, Ausgewählte Schriften, Berlin, 1896, 86; J. Wackernagel, Vorlesungen über Syntax II, Basel, 1924, 149.

4.

For this, compare my conception of the essence of the celebration in my study of ancient religion: Die antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1995, pp. 33–51 [Spanish edition available: La religión antigua, Herder, Barcelona, 1999].

5.

In Hesych, one might also add Therteria, a virtually unknown festival, and most likely Stepteria, which in Hesych is rendered as σεπτηρία, a festival whose main ceremony is depicted in Quaest. Graec. 293 C, by Plutarch, as Stepterion: Στεπτήριον behaves exactly in the same way towards Στεπτήρια as the concept of μυστήριον does towards Μυστήρια.

6.

Zeus Soter in Aetolia: IG. II 323.

7.

Core Soteira in Cyzicus: it is there that she holds Mysteries, which are described as 'great', and it is for this reason that they are distinguished from other 'small' ones. She may have received the additional names at a later date. No one can say whether the festivals at Cyzicus bearing the names of Koreia and Pherephattia were associated with the great or the small Mysteries. The sources of information can be found in M. P. Nilsson, Griechische Feste, Leipzig, 1906, p. 359.

8.

In the Prochristeria, a festival of Pallas Athena classified as 'mystical', it is difficult to decide whether it is the goddess who brings joy to humans (προχαρίζεται), or whether it is they who first offer her a gift in gratitude (χαριστήρια). Even more enigmatic is the name of the festival Proschairesteria: cf. Deubner (note 3) 17.

9.

Isocrates IV 157: ἐν τῇι τελετῇι τῶν Μυστηρίων. This distinction is even more evident in the later usage of the words: Flav. Jos. XIX 1 ἐν τινῶν τελεταῖς μυοτηρίων.

10.

Conv. II 2 ἐν Ἐλευσῖνι μετὰ τὰ Μυστήρια τῆς πανηγύρεως ἀκμαζούσης we were feasting.

11.

Comp. Mommsen: Feste der Stadt Athen, Leipzig 1898, a work which, from the point of view of the calendar, should be given preference over that of Deubner.

12.

Herodotus also refers to similar secret cults in Egypt in this way: II 170.

13.

R. Guardini, ‘On Rainer Maria Rilke’s Interpretation of Existence’, Schriften für die geistige Überlieferung IV, Berlin, 1941, p. 26.

14.

Cf. Deubner (note 3), 9.

15.

The Torre Nova sarcophagus and the Lovatelli urn, both depicted in Deubner Vol. 7.

16.

Fr. 137a; Cicero's position: De Legibus, II 375.

17.

The arguments of A. Mommsen (note 11), p. 406.

18.

Nic. Fr. 74, 56: 'The muscles are at rest.'

19.

Nilsson (note 7), 358.

20.

Schol. Aristophanes Lys. 645. Another late inscription: Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua IV 281.

21.

Hippolytus, Reference V 7, 34: 'This … is the great and supreme Eleusinian mystery; drink, drink.' V. 8, 39 showing to those who behold the great, wondrous and most perfect mystery in silence; a consecrated sheaf. The unusual placement of ἐν σιωπῇι is explained by Hippolytus's ironic emphasis.

22.

II 51; cf. O. Kern: ‘Misterien’ in RE XVI 2, p. 1209.

23.

Comp. against the unfounded criticism of H. Bolkensteins: ‘Hermes, the Conductor of Souls’, Part II of this book.

24.

By P. Wolters and G. Bruns, Das kabirenheiligtum bei Theben I, Arch. Inst. d. Deutschen Reiches, Berlin, 1940.

25.

Diodorus lived in the 1st century BC.

26.

See R. Pettazzoni: La confessione dei peccati III, Bologna, 1936, p. 177, where the linguistic evidence is best presented. And Callimachus’ explicit testimony regarding the ‘Tyrrhenian’ origin of a μυστικὸς λόγος from Samothrace; see K. Kerényi, ‘Hermes, the Conductor of Souls’.

27.

In the Apophthegmata Laconica, found under the name of Plutarch, 217 D and 229 D; cf. Pettazzoni’s analysis, p. 164.

28.

What greater thing has he done in life?

29.

‘He has done what was most unjust to himself in life.’

30.

See O. Kern, ‘Kabeiros und Kabeiroi’ in RE X 2, 1399 ff.

31.

Preller/Robert, Greek Mythology I, Berlin, 1894, 858, 4.

32.

Ephorus in Strabo IX 401; cf. the ever-instructive interpretation by K. O. Müller, Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie, Göttingen, 1825, p. 146 ff.

33.

Strabo IX 412.

34.

W. Borgeaud, Les Illyriens en Grèce et en Italie, Thèse, Geneva, 1943, 134.

35.

Sources and literature in Borgeaud 136.

36.

Apollo of Rhodes, Arg. I 916; ‘Electra’, like Electrone, the daughter of Helios, belongs to ἠλέκτωρ, a word meaning ‘sun’.

37.

Paus. IX 25, interpreted as follows; ‘Kabirienheiligtum’, 7 ff.

38.

Hom. Hymn. Merc. I 20 ἔργωι δ′ ἔργον ὄπαζε.

39.

This goddess, objectively speaking, must be present through her connection with the Telchines, that is, with figures akin to the Cabiri.

40.

Demetrius of Scepsis, in Strabo X 472 and Strabo XII 556.

41.

This basic information (and its sources) can already be found in C. A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus*, Königsberg, 1829, vol. I, pp. 105 ff.

42.

The use of bramaderas in Greek secret cults (τελεταί) is expressly noted by the Pythagorean Archytas, fr. I Diels. They are called ῥόμβοι and ῥύμβοι, cf. esp. Et. M. s. v.; their identity with the Berekyndai:

Schol. in Ap. Rod. Arg. I 1139; the higher significance of these positions is recognised by R. Pettazzoni, I Misteri, Bologna, 1923, p. 3.

43.

See Preller/Robert (note 31), 850 ff.

44.

On the mythological connection between Demeter and the Cabiri, see: ‘Hermes, the Conductor of Souls’, Part II of this book.

45.

The text of Pausanias, from this point onwards (IX 25, 6), is transmitted in a somewhat confused manner. Potnieus is rendered as Potneus, perhaps through a deliberate alteration. The ending of Alexarius must have been incorrect: Alexiares was the more correct reading.

46.

Cf. M. P. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechischen Religion I (Handbuch der Altertumwiss. V 2), Munich, 1941, 140.

47.

Cf. E. Schwyzer, Griechische Grammatik I (Handbuch der Altertumwiss. II I), Munich, 1939, 218.

48.

Pausanias I 14.2; II 22.1.

49.

According to another tradition, he was called Mysios, a name befitting the first Mystes; cf. Preller/Robert (note 31), note 751.

50.

cf. J. Toepffer, Attische Genealogie, Berlin, 1889, 25.

51.

Lukian, Lexiph. 10; Toepffer, p. 52.

52.

Skyphos of Hiero, reproduction by Nilsson (note 46), plate 43, I.

53.

Toepffer, p. 26.

54.

He was the father-in-law of Miltiades, the victor at Marathon; Thucydides' father was also called Oloros; cf. on his kinship with Miltiades, Toepffer, p. 282. The corresponding Latin name (olor) means 'swan'.

55.

Plato, Phaedrus 229b; Pausanias I, 38, 2.

56.

Etym. Magnum s. v.; this lake was said to lie south of Eleusis, ‘beyond the isthmus’, that is to say, within the vast domain of Poseidon.

57.

The poems in Toepffer (note 50), pp. 52 and 62.

58.

Pausanias I 38, 6; Toepffer 30.

59.

Pausanias VIII 25, 4; See Jung/Kerényi, Einfürhrung in das Wesen der Mythologie, Hildesheim, 1980.

60.

In the poem of the Cyclades, Cypria in Athenaois 334 B; K. Kerényi, ‘Mnemosyne’, in Humanistische Seelensforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 243–251.

61.

K. Kerényi, Humanistic Psychology, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 243–251.

62.

Wolters/Bruns (note 24), table 26, plates 9 and 10; the interpretation of the winged goddess as Iris is mistaken: it is Hecate, not Iris, who acts as a

messenger role in the mythological motif of Persephone, and she also has a connection with the Cabiri, who purify her; cf. Preller/Robert (note 31), p. 324.

63.

Wolters/Bruns (note 24), p. 10.

64.

One of the oldest examples, published in Wolters' *Eph. Arch.* 1892, is the geometric amphora from Thebes bearing a depiction of the 'Herrin der Tiere', reproduced by Nilsson, plate 30, I.

65.

Wolters/Bruns (note 24), plate 5; at the bottom of our plate.

66.

K. Kerényi, 'Das Ägäische Fest und Der große Daimon des Symposion', in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 92–119; 226–242; and 'Hermes, the Conductor of Souls', Part II of this book.

67.

Wolters/Bruns (note 24), Table 29; reproductions 3 and 4; the first at the top of our table. The Mystes Cabiri are frequently depicted as pygmies in the drawings on the vases. On the relationship with the Cabiri themselves: K. Kerényi, 'Das Ägäische Fest' in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 92–119, esp. p. 106.

68.

However, however much the author admires Bachofen's genius, and to avoid a superficial generalisation, it must be made clear that the present interpretations differ from Bachofen's both in principle and in outcome; cf. 'Bachofen und die Zukunft des Humanismus', in Wege und Weggenossen 2, Munich-Vienna, 1988, p. 116. Confirmation of the fact that in the crane scenes the birds represent 'celestial' beings, the feminine element, is provided by the two transformation stories in Ovid, Metamorphoses VI pp. 90–97: the transformation of the Pygmy woman Gerana (the feminine form γέρανος of 'the crane') into the kind of birds that from that moment on waged war against the Pygmies; and the story of Antigone, a daughter of Laomedon, who was transformed into a stork.

69.

Wolters/Burns (note 24), Table 33, Figure 3.

70.

Ibid., Table 33, Figure 1.

71.

Hesych, s.v. βάκχος· κλάδος ὁ ἐν ταῖς τελεταῖς.

72.

The image discussed below, from Wolters/Bruns (note 24), plate 30, fig. 3, which appears in the centre of our plate. Rear of the vessel: ibid., plate 53, fig. 4, Berlin Inv. 3285. Arch. Anz. 1895, pp. 36, 31; G. Weicker, 'Seelenvogel', Leipzig, 1902, p. 148; Wolters/Bruns (note 24), p. 111. A similar, independent depiction, without the fantastical birds, on a Lebes in Heidelberg, Inv. VI 77, ibid., plate 55, note 1. The same scene as a repetitive decoration on

margin of a Lebes in Paris, ibid., plate 36, notes 1 and 2. In a fragment, plate 55, note 6, showing half the scene.

73.

The ῥόμβος associated with the verb ῥέμβειν is also expressed through souls that move freely from outside the body: Plutarch, De Sera num. vind. 22.

74.

Read in the Hymn Orphic, in the Curetes armed (38, 21): In Samothrace, you rise … eternal winds, soul-nourishers, priest-like.

75.

With this, which is now repeated, only an introduction has been given to the true representation of the great Greek mysteries, especially the Samothracian and Eleusinian ones. The Dionysian, whose elements abound in the Cabirion of Thebes – not for nothing does the Dionysian krater occupy the central position, that of the mixing vessel from which the figures emerge, in the Cabiro-Pais-Crateia-Mitos scene – retained a special significance in that adaptation. The Orphic, with which it is related – as perhaps later Gnosticism – establishes, in the author's view, a special category, the scientific assessment of which requires considerable differentiation. A preliminary to this: K. Kerényi, 'Pythagoras und Orpheus', in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 14–41.

IV. PROMETHEUS

Prometheus. Plato, dated to the 6th century

BC. Vatican Museums, Rome

PRELIMINARY COMMENTARY

If the example discussed here—that of the representation of a mythological theme—were to be continued in any other volume of a similar nature, it would have to be in Ortega y Gasset's work devoted to hunting.1 A model of rigorous and sensitive observation, in which distinctive features are highlighted and appropriately—to put it in a word: scientifically—related to a fundamental human activity. This is how a mythologeme comes to the fore: the pre-philosophical interpretation of human existence, of Dasein, in Greece. The Greek word mythologeme, however, derives from mythologeîn, the verbal designation of an activity—mythology, mythologia in Greek—which can be placed alongside other transcendent and playful activities of humanity, especially in certain periods, the most ancient in history. Alongside the content, we shall also be interested in the activity itself, since the differences and characteristic features are of great importance.

One of the characteristic features is represented by a mental activity, whilst another, from a different perspective, suggests that this activity may resemble the movement of a specific substance. To engage more fully with a mythologem, we must follow that which moves in response to shifts in transmission, as if we had set out to hunt a noble beast. This task is far removed from the mere recording or chronological ordering of transmitted material—tasks fulfilled by the great encyclopaedias of mythology and the manuals of reference. Follow closely a activity called
'Mythology' – the study of how mythologists mythologise, but taking an active part in the process, as Ortega y Gasset does, for example, when he goes hunting for the hunters – will be absolutely essential. Just as the natural sciences require experience, empiricism – empeiria, in Greek – the humanities must have an experimental basis, which through the least allows them to a peîra – an
'experiment' with the mental activities they are engaged in.

‘Peîra toi mathésios archá,’ says the Greek poet Alkmann: ‘To have experienced something oneself is the beginning of learning.’ It is poets who are best placed to lead us in experimenting with mythologems that have long been lost. When they remain engaged with the living tradition, becoming mythologists – mythologoi, narrators of myth – without straying from the framework of the mythologem, from the broad outlines found in earlier manifestations of the myth: this is the approach of the ancient poets. Or by experiencing the ancient myth within themselves, examining it at the very least, and being able to convey to us their own particular peîra, which is certainly an ‘experience’, a peîra, and not merely knowledge of the subject matter, a mere orientation attained through appropriate training and studies: this is the approach characteristic of the modern poet. Nevertheless, whether in one way or another, both interpret the resonance that the content would in any case awaken in us, and know how to amplify it. The theme of Prometheus was frequently revisited by modern poetry. And it was Goethe, above all others, who stood between us and the ancient mythologists: a modern mythologist in these creations, and so he cannot be considered merely from the point of view of literary science (a point of view that forms the basis, whilst the other must be added to it), but also from that of the science of mythology. And in the middle, between us and Antiquity, stands Goethe, not only in the sense of a mediator of a reinterpretation of the subject matter, but also in the sense of the obstacle that his new mythological motif, in a certain way, introduces on the path towards understanding the ancient. Although, on the other hand, unlike any other modern poet who deals with Prometheus, Goethe, in his capacity as a spontaneous interpreter, also serves as an aid. Through his poetics, and the way of interpreting them, we must construct the path to follow.

Relationships with a mythologem, in any case, cannot be situated at the point where it originates. It is a paradox of mythology that mythologems—the broad features of early renditions of earlier myths, as well as those of the figures who appear as dramatic characters on stage—are already present from a historical perspective, from which we always begin. Hypotheses regarding origin, however astute they may be, necessarily neglect the realm of formal scientific endeavour – and the majority are nothing more than fanciful and unprovable

products of today's people–. The theme of Prometheus, as a specific example of the scientific treatment of mythological content, has the advantage of offering two avenues of access to a scientific approach that is singularly clear and open: the and already mentioned, to through the 'experimentation', from peîra, and that which stems from theory based on facts derived from transmission and comparative ethnological material. An entry point that can be accessed by addressing the following questions: what does 'science of mythology' mean? and what does 'mythology'? In this way, we shall first establish the theoretical exemplarity of the Prometheus mythologem – succinctly set out at the end of this volume, under the entry 'Greek mythology', in the sense of the author's theoretical works. And, following this theoretical clarification, with the question of who it is that confronts us in the mythologem, we can now begin to explore the concrete.

1. WHO IS GOETHE'S PROMETHEUS?

PROMETHEUS AND CHRIST

Of all the Greek gods, Prometheus is the one who has the most extraordinary relationship with humanity: a relationship which, through both similarity and contrast, recalls the Christian concept of the Redeemer. Prometheus stands by humanity, showing solidarity with it as no other Greek god does. Therein lies his resemblance to Christ and the latter's relationship with humanity, although Christ, as a man, endures a human existence. His close connection with humanity, as a prerequisite to his work, is first revealed through the faith of Christians, for whom he is the god, in all his paradox. It is paradoxical that faith is professed in that divinity with the appearance of a man, and not in his aspect of solidarity with humanity. Prometheus never appears as a man. He is a mythological being who has always belonged to mythology, and since no mythology would subsequently be created around him either, appearing as a divine being is the most natural thing for him.

The paradox surrounding Prometheus stems from his portrayal of humanity, in that, as a god, he endures injustice, torment and humiliation – hallmarks of human existence. This close connection with humans constitutes the paradox in itself. And this is how he is conceived in the Greek world, much like the divinity of Christ in the Christian creed. At most, he could be regarded as a god of the Gnostics, known in Greek as anthropos, 'man' or 'primordial man', as a parallel between religious history and the mythological motif of Prometheus. Here too, of course, the differences would be significant. Nevertheless, to venture into a discussion of the primordial Gnostic man would be tantamount to entering another realm, a transition from mythology to gnosis, whereas in this study we have chosen to confine ourselves to the mythological tradition; a limitation only insofar as we might thereby relinquish our own concept, likewise shaped by the Christianity and the gnosis of the

divine saviours and the indignant, and to settle into the state of those who do not yet know.

This state, ideally free from all elements of traditional education, can only be achieved gradually. Simply saying, ‘Let no one think of Goethe’s *Prometheus*!’ is not enough. Those who are unfamiliar with it will not think of it anyway, and those who are familiar with it will have come to know *Prometheus* through that work. One might only ask: which one? One that has nothing to do with the Prometheus conveyed by the ancient poets and reference works? It would be too simplistic for an interpreter of Goethe’s Prometheus poems to urge us, for the sake of convenience, to free ourselves from all Greek mythology!2 Neither the Greeks nor Goethe are easily forgotten. Goethe, in a sense, has already written the prologue for us, enabling us to make a first serious engagement with the subject of Prometheus.

Cover your sky, Zeus,

with misty clouds!

Devote yourself, like a lad

cutting thistle flowers,

to the oaks and mountain peaks! But

leave me my land,

the hut you have not built, and

also my home

whose hearth you

envy me for.

I know of nothing poorer

under the sun, O gods, than you.

You petty ones, you
feed your majesty
with the tributes that are the offerings
and the breath of prayers;
and you would starve to death were it
not for the mad, hopeful
the children and the beggars.

When I was a child
and everything within me
was confusion, my eyes
disoriented
They gazed at the sun as though
beyond it there were ears to hear
my lament and a heart like mine,
capable of taking pity on the distressed.

Who helped me
against the arrogance of the Titans?
Who saved me from death and
slavery?

Have you not done it all, sacred
and ardent heart? Ardent, young,
good,
did you not give thanks, deceived,
for saving you, he who slept on high?

Honour you, I? Why?
Have you eased the suffering
of those who live in despair?
Have you wiped away the
tears of the anguished?

Have not almighty time
and eternal destiny, my
masters as well as yours?

Did you perhaps believe
that I ought to hate life,
take refuge in the desert,
since not all the dreams of my
youthful dawn came to fruition?

Here I am, shaping men in my

likeness and image;

a lineage that resembles me, that

suffers, that weeps,

who will enjoy and

rejoice and, like me,

does not respect you.

SUPPLEMENT THROUGH THE DRAMATIC FRAGMENT

Goethe bursts into this poem with great impetus, drawing on his most personal spiritual experiences of the traditional mythological figure. Did he do so without preparation?
Or did the dramatic fragment of *Prometheus* already exist, and did his creative work bear fruit in the play (letter to Kestner, July 1773)? The question was raised again recently and was answered incorrectly by renowned interpreters of Goethe.3 Nor should we be content with the impression that Goethe had exceeded the limits of his already begun dramatic work with the unsurpassable boldness of the aforementioned verses. When the dramatic fragment, long thought lost for almost half a century, resurfaced, the poet stated quite categorically that the third act was to begin with ‘the well-known monologue’ (letter to Zelter, 11 May 1820). For this reason, in 1830, following the publication of the two rediscovered acts, he had the following stage direction added: ‘Prometheus in his workshop’. By comparing the passages in which the dramatic fragment complements the ‘lyrical’ one, or rather, those in which they agree with it, we shall praise Goethe’s good memory, which allows us to trace the work of the young mythologist within him, for that is what he was at that time, rather than an experienced playwright.

In the monologue, Prometheus says that the earth is his:

Yet leave my land

in peace.

It is hard to say what that meant: ownership, familiarity, or solidarity and belonging? Even if everything here is conceived with greater clarity than in the drama's two preceding acts, one must consult them in order to gauge the exact weight of this word and also to perceive the precise contours of a cosmogonic situation involving the division of the world. The gods were prepared to vacate Olympus for Prometheus and keep only the heavens: there, at the summit of Olympus, this is the proposal brought to him by his brother Epimetheus:

… so that you may dwell there

and from there rule over the earth.

Prometheus, however, believed that he already possessed the earth, not as property obtained through a division, but as a direct possession:

They are incapable of stealing from me what I possess,

and as for what they possess, let each defend it with

what is his own, and all in peace.

Epimetheus: How much, then, is yours?

Prometheus: Well, the circle that encompasses my

activity! Nothing below it, nor anything above…

What right do those stars on high have over me to

presume to force their will upon me?

For this mythologist, Prometheus is the ‘lord of the earth’, in a special, mythological sense, perhaps in the same way that Hades is the ‘lord of the underworld’ due to an early division and not because his realm of dominion had been created. The idea that Prometheus’s allusion to ‘the working day’ should be understood in a biblical sense, as the work of the creation of the world, is certainly confusing. Prometheus’s creative work, likewise according to Goethe’s mythological motif, is limited exclusively to that which he is capable of achieving on earth:

This is where my world, my universe, lies!

This is where I feel myself!

Here I see, in bodily form,

all my longings! My spirit, divided into a thousand

parts and yet wholly united

in my beloved children!

At first it was only

… their world of clay

and was brought to life by fate:

Look down, Zeus,

take a look at my world: it lives!

The lord of the earth, whose spirit is fragmented a thousandfold in his creatures, mankind, does not recognise him as a god, for he ceded this name to the divine, but conceives of himself as identically infinite and almighty by virtue of his spirit's power, which is not inherent to the gods, the lords of the forces of nature:

Can you perhaps squeeze in my fist

the vast expanse of heaven and earth? (This

is the skill of the visual artist).

Can you separate me from

myself?

(This is the poet's gift).

Can you expand me, broaden me, until I take on

the dimensions of a world?

Man, solely by virtue of his spirit, is capable of this. If the gods possess power, there is another power that opposes them: the power of the spirit, which recognises itself not as its own, but as a divinity, as Minerva (rather than Pallas Athena, as was the custom in language at the time). This is the lucid meaning of the dialogue with the goddess:

Prometheus: … those were your

words. So I was not myself,

but a goddess to whom I spoke, when

I imagined myself speaking;

and when I imagined it was a goddess who was speaking,

it was I who was doing so.

Such was the love I had for you, always so intimately

united and intertwined!

Neither the gods nor the lord of the earth – and we might now include the term ‘man’ in this – are capable solely ‘of bestowing and taking away life’ through the power of their divine spirit. That is reserved for fate. Prometheus discovers this through the goddess at the end of the first act. There, fate intervenes and governs ‘the source of all life’. The second act is devoted to life, in a way that Nietzsche could not surpass. This act establishes, from this point onwards, Prometheus’s boundless desire to continue creating, and with it the third act begins. We have already touched upon the second act with the quotation:

Look down, Zeus,

cast your gaze upon my world: it lives!

The continuation reads:

I have fashioned it in my likeness, I

have moulded a race equal to myself,

so that they may suffer, weep, take pleasure and rejoice,

without caring about you at all, just as I do!

Verses that are repeated in the famous monologue. However, if the refined form we now know had already existed at that time, Goethe would never have written them in that way. There they are, still unpolished, in their most primordial state.

A comparison of another sequence of verses, almost identical in the dialogue with Mercury and in the great monologue, also reveals to us, in addition to the polished refinements, a more precise outline of the mythological motif of the childhood of Goethe's Prometheus. From the dramatic fragment we learn that Zeus was his father and that he had a goddess for a mother. With these variations on the traditional lineage, the poet distanced his hero from the line of the Titans. But he also set him in opposition to them, allowing a glimpse of the threats to which the child or young man was exposed. Mercury reproaches him for the fact that his parents had protected him:

Prometheus: Against whom? Against dangers they themselves feared?

Did they perhaps shield my heart from serpents

lurking in secret?

Did they steel this breast so that I might

defy the Titans?

The use of the word 'neidschen' ['hateful', 'humiliating'], derived from Middle High German, lends particular weight to the belief that, had the play been completed, Goethe would have polished it with minor revisions, eliminating contradictions and repetitions. As a mythologist, he must surely have drawn on an episode from the childhood of Heracles, the son of Zeus, whom his father did not save from the snakes that threatened him, but rather he saved himself, although it was not entirely clear whether Prometheus was fighting real or imaginary monsters. The monologue alludes more clearly to the fate of another son of Zeus, Dionysus, who suffered

the torment inflicted by the Titans (in the Homeric Hymn) for being enslaved:

Who helped me subdue the

arrogance of the Titans?

Who saved me from death, from

slavery?

And the fragment continued as follows:

Did not the virile anvil forge me

by almighty Time and eternal Fate, your lords

and mine?

Nor is fate forgotten in the monologue, with the power to bestow life that Prometheus experienced at the end of the second act:

Has not almighty Time forged me

as a man

and eternal destiny,

your lords or mine?

GOETHE INTERPRETS HIS MYTHOLOGEM

In 1813 or 1814, during the first phase of work on Dichtung und Wahrheit [‘Poetry and Truth: From My Life’, Alba Publishers], towards the end of Book XV, Goethe set about explaining the fragments of the adolescent Prometheus. It is unlikely that he did not recall the dramatic fragments, which at that time were thought to be lost. Already in the second sentence of his explanation he mentions the ‘protection of parents and relatives’, and this is precisely what Mercury did in the opening lines of the drama: ‘And may they protect you!’ He significantly emphasises the meaning with the first line:
‘The common destiny of mankind, to which we are all bound, / must prove more painful for those who develop their spiritual faculties earlier and more fully’. I separate the two elements with a slash, which Goethe himself places immediately at the forefront, as the most important for understanding his Prometheus myth: the common human destiny and those men with the most developed spirit, for whom it is harder to bear than for all others.

Both of these tragically intertwined elements – the fate of mankind and the barely bearable nature of existence – had been experienced by the young Goethe himself, and now, forty years later, he evokes them once more. He sees himself in retrospect when he ‘treads the winepress alone’: a word of God, in Isaiah 63. 3., which at the same time evokes a preoccupation with the original humans in Goethe’s 1807/8 drama *Prometheus*, *‘Pandora’*, as a situational image: ‘All the grape-gatherers, leaving the winepresses, / entering the stony cellars…’. That primordial human situation, which each person experiences within themselves in divine solitude, without the presence of other men, facilitated the foundation of existence. Goethe utters the word and alludes to its invocation, to that which enables him to found his own existence at that time, to his fruitful talent: ‘Thus, upon this I would like to found my entire existence in thought, my Dasein. That idea became an image; the ancient mythological figure of Prometheus appeared before me, and he, cast out by the gods, populated the world from his workshop.”

Goethe’s mythological motif does not in fact concern human existence or its creation. Nor does it concern art or its invention or initiation to make human existence more bearable. Goethe had experienced both art and the difficulty of bearing human fate within himself: this

was the other circumstance upon which, alongside the common destiny, the poet wished to found his own existence, his individual Dasein. Thus he thought of Prometheus, a special being among the gods and the Titans. He also describes his mythological approach with precision, in which he once again highlights two elements: ‘The fable of Prometheus lived within me. / I tailored the old titan’s garb to my own measure…’. Prometheus is not the common artist, but he, the young Goethe: this explains the lyrical character, arising from that mode of mythologising. Yet it remained a form of mythologising. The two characteristic elements of that spiritual pursuit are represented here: the spontaneous, through which a mythological figure and his story – a mythologem – seek expression as a personal experience, and the search for expression in mythological transmission.

In any case, at this point, and compared with the ancient mythologists, Goethe had greater freedom. He himself explains how he tailors the titan’s ancient garb to his own liking. His method, however, is quite reminiscent of mythological practice, as I have taken the liberty of demonstrating in light of recent discoveries among peoples with a mythology still alive, drawing on two outstanding and judicious contemporaries:4 the archaic man, before acting, takes a step back, much like the bullfighter as he prepares to deliver the fatal thrust. He seeks a pattern in the past into which he might slip, as if beneath an old diver’s bell, protected and detached, so as to then pounce upon the present problem.

At that time, Goethe’s problem, as he himself acknowledges, was the individual foundation of existence, of his own Dasein, which established something far more existential than any teaching on art and artists. Whilst striving to resolve his vital problem through his own identification with a mythological figure, he conceived a mythologem and became more of a mythologist than a playwright. Meanwhile, he also clung to his essential experience of that time, the experience of isolation, and broke into the poetic form of this condition, the monody; he not only broke with the dramatic form, which might still have permitted it, but also with the mythological tradition, in order to return to the foundation of the original mythologem, enriching it with a new feature, which he had meanwhile also recognised in the ancient image of Prometheus.

THE MODERN ASPECT OF GOETHE'S MYTHOLOGEM

What was modern about Goethe at that time, in his experience of the defining emerging feature of man's destiny, was the isolation in which every man found himself, and which the poet accepted with conviction. And this is what he was referring to, as well as precisely the consequences of this acceptance, in his interpretation of his own wisdom in old age: 'My works, which garnered so much acclaim, were the offspring of solitude, and since my relationship with the world had expanded, I lacked neither the strength nor the taste for invention, but the realisation of them was paralysed because in reality I lacked a style in prose and poetry, and with every new work, depending on what the aim was, I was always groping in the dark and felt compelled to start from scratch. Insofar as I thus shunned the protection of man, who excluded me, so too did I, in a Promethean manner, separate myself from the gods, all the more naturally so, since by my nature and way of thinking I feel a permanent predisposition to devour and reject all others."

A consequence of this acceptance of man's fate, with the isolation and the disposition to turn away from the gods, formed the mythological motif of Goethe's Prometheus. His Prometheus was the ancient god who, whilst caring for mankind, followed his own path, but not like the true Titans, with their 'gigantic, titanic sense of devastating the heavens'. He merely wished to separate himself, and for this reason he did not wish to be a god either, but rather to found a 'third dynasty': a humanity, like that of the young Goethe, like himself. But how could the founder still remain isolated, when with him too a humanity was beginning whose destiny was the 'common fate of the isolated'? Did that isolation not always represent a feature of the human being, which had only now been recognised, and was it not precisely for this reason that this new Prometheus – viewed from the new era – was the authentic one, and his mythological motif the true mythological motif of human destiny? A mythological motif far more complex than the ancient one, yet still the result of the long and ancient work of mythology.

It was fitting, then, that Goethe should imagine the little Prometheus in the situation of the primordial orphan threatened by the earliest mythologists: that is to say, in the manner of the ancient mythological tales, reflecting in his

images of the initial state brought about by the very birth of every newborn being.5 Whether he was thinking specifically of Heracles threatened by the snakes, or of the infant Dionysus torn to pieces by the Titans, remains uncertain. The Prometheus attacked by the Titans no longer belongs to Greek mythology, but to a mythology originating with Goethe. And it was also in keeping with his way of mythologising that, to find inspiration among all the existing traditions of Prometheus, he chose an artistic one: a drawing reproducing the Roman relief on a sarcophagus situated near Montfaucon, which is also described in Hederich's school encyclopaedia of mythology: in which one can see a seated Prometheus, shaping the image of a man, a basket full of clay at his side and, before him, an elaborate figure, the soul in the form of a butterfly being welcomed by Minerva.6

If he is neither a god, nor a Titan, nor a man, can we—or indeed should we—answer the question of who Goethe's Prometheus is? The intensity with which he has been created is, whether intentionally or not, biblical, whilst the marked contempt for God is equally anti-biblical; this is the effect it was intended to provoke and, at the same time, to establish another way of fundamentally relating to the Bible. Through this portrayal, the figure of Goethe's Prometheus is defined.

A poetic 'intermediate figure', expressed in a reassuring manner by the interpretation itself, rules out the notion that mythologisation is a strangely fixed and purely poetic pursuit, even if it does not silence the death of the pious Mendelssohn, which occurred upon his encounter with this new Prometheus. No god, no titan, no man, but the immortal primal image of man moved and convinced of his destiny: the primitive inhabitant of the earth as a 'counter-god', appointed as sovereign of the earth. In this sense, he appears more Gnostic than Greek, though he has nothing to do with the childish gnosis of the still-young Goethe.

It pertains even more to the new spiritual history and precedes the image of man in Nietzsche and existentialism, or perhaps goes even further. From the young Goethe's mythologising, the classical figure of Prometheus could not be reborn, but rather an entirely modern figure, whose effect on the new generation the old master greatly feared at the very moment the lost manuscripts appeared (letter to Zelter, 11 May 1820).

2. THE ETERNITY OF THE HUMAN SPECIES AND THE TITANIC

THE HUMAN SPECIES AND HUMAN RACES

Contradiction, and isolation accepted as a common fate, does not form part of the Greek conception of the human being. The difference between being human and being a god was emphasised as much as possible in the eyes of the Greeks: the human being was both deilón and deimón at the same time.7 In their view, there was no being more wretched, more insignificant, or more filled with anguish than the human being. And yet, there were sufficient grounds for the chorus's song in Sophocles' Antigone (332/4):

There are many terrible things,

but none is more terrible than man.

This was how the human race had been conceived, in contrast to the race of 'the gods of the easy life'. Hesiod also spoke of other human races that had become extinct, no doubt drawing on the Eastern model, and right up until the end of Antiquity the belief persisted that certain festivals, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, had to be celebrated to prevent the extinction of all humanity. People feared devastating global catastrophes – to quote Goethe – of a Neptunian or volcanic nature, famines and wars, or perhaps those caused by profound cyclical changes. Individual death did not threaten the human species; the mortality of mortals – the bleakest of all – merely added a nuance to the pervasive characteristic of deilón, the common human misery. A vision of the eternity of the human race emerged from certain prophecies of dark future images, even if it was not incompatible with the recognition of the power of the gods of death. Bear this view in mind.

A PYTHAGOREAN TEACHING

That doctrine, according to which the human race is believed to have always existed, has as its authors Pythagoras of Samos, Ocellus of Lucania, Archytas of Tarentum, and all those who were so Pythagorean. According to the words of the late Roman author Censorinus in his treatise on the day of birth (De die natali 4. 3), Pythagoras of Samos, Ocellus of Lucania, Archytas of Tarentum and all the Pythagorean masters were both the originators and defenders of the view that the human race is eternal. We are familiar with the Pythagorean line of thought regarding the subject of the treatise on the universe, which bears the name of the Lucanian. This, translated somewhat freely, is what it says (3.1.3.):

Man is not made of earth or of other living creatures, be they animals or plants. Assuming that the order of the world is eternal, without beginning or end – and this is certainly the thesis of the Pythagoreans – then everything whose order (diakósmesis) is the order of the world (kósmos) must also be eternal. Firstly, the parts of this eternal Whole must have existed from the beginning: the sky, the earth and, between them, the air, for without it, a world composed of these elements cannot exist. And since its parts are eternal, everything they contain must have existed from the beginning: the Sun, the Moon and the stars with the sky; animals and plants with the earth; gold and silver with the air of the winds and the changes in temperature. That is why the sky is the sky, for that is what it contains, just as the earth contains the earth and the air contains the air. And since a species has been added to each of these parts, which is not only contained within it but surpasses it – the gods to the sky, men to the earth, the daimons to the sphere of the air – the human race must necessarily also be eternal: that is to say, if the deduction is correct, that not only do the parts coexist with the Whole of the world – with order – but also with what is contained within these parts, that is, with what is ordered.

Here, in a work written before the 1st century BC, the Greek conception of the cosmos as diakósmesis, of the world as order, is developed to its ultimate consequences. It makes clear that this conception likewise includes the human race as something eternal, provided that, as occurs in a naive anthropocentric conception of the world, it is not situated

at the centre or thereabouts, as might occur in a less naive philosophical reflection, in which man is conceived as the organiser or coordinator of that order. The naive pre-philosophical concept of the world, which is not the result of philosophising but of mythologising, since it serves as a foundation, does not have human beings as its centre. On earth, man, and in heaven, the gods form its two poles. The daimones – who are not malevolent spirits, but creatures half-god and half-man – occupy in the air the intermediate sphere between heaven and earth, in a sense merely to link the two positions correctly. It is not to them that Greek mythology can be attributed, but to the flourishing teachings here and there of the daimones, to which the Pythagoreans adhered.

THE CONCEPT OF THE WORLD IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

The duality of gods and men, of two species situated at opposing poles, is so clearly expressed in the ancient poets that in them we can very easily recognise a basic and characteristic feature of the Greek mythological worldview:

one of men

one of the living; yet from one we breathe

both of them, and every created thing

power, so that the one is nothing, but the other is certain, and the eternal

remains unchanging—

One is the nature

of men and gods. We both drew

the breath of the same mother. Yet a whole force separates us,

that here it is nothing, but there it is of bronze, a safe haven

that endures eternally in the heavens.

In this way, united and yet separate, Pindar shows us the race of men and that of the gods in the sixth Ode to Nemea. The separation is complete. Men remain on one side: as nothing; and on the other is heaven, as the eternally unshakeable abode of the gods. This eternity, safe from any danger, is representative of an attribute of the abode of the gods, the heavens, which, in a way, encircle the human race with their body; and at the same time is appropriate for those who dwell on high, since they use it as a throne. Through this particularity of the surrounding element, the heavens, the other race, that of the gods, coincides as the delimiter of the human race. And that which surrounds and delimits it does not constitute something truly concrete – perhaps tangible – for man, but rather something intangible and, nevertheless, hard: 'metallic'. Here, the metal does not express a supposed materiality, as if it had been forged in heaven, but rather something paradoxical: the inconceivable hardness of that which is intangible – of the gods themselves and their abode.

Pindar, however, not only separates but also unites gods and men; before him, Hesiod had already done so in Works and Days (108):

ὡς ὁμόθεν γεγάασι θεοὶ θνητοί τ᾽ἄνθρωποι

Gods and mortal men are of the same origin.

Something which, in the minds of both poets, must never be forgotten, not even when they instruct us on the decline or insignificance of the human race. According to the great Greek mythological tradition, humanity, like the gods, descends from Gaia, from Mother Earth. A creation determined by man, in this mythological world – earth-bound and divided into gods and men – is not even considered. Man is present neither as a creation nor as a rebel, but as one of the poles. At the other pole are the celestial gods.

WHO WERE THE TITANS?

These fundamental features of the worldview of Greek mythology, which, like the Prometheus of the young Goethe, form the motto and preamble here, have become somewhat more comprehensible; though at the same time, something has also become questionable. It had become clear to us, as we have already indicated, that both Hesiod and Aeschylus, our sources for understanding the mythological motif of Prometheus – that of the late Archaic and early Classical periods – knew nothing, nor wished to know anything, about the possibility that the Titans were the creators of man. For the mythological worldview, as well as the figures of mythology, introduces this paradox: existing prior to the poets, even though it was they who gave it form. In the interpretation of the texts on Prometheus, now regarded as classics, the idea of his creation of mankind must be definitively abandoned. We must then ask ourselves: how could creatures such as the Titans exist within such a cosmological vision, if they were neither gods nor men, nor even something intermediate such as daimons?

The question ‘Who were the Titans?’, despite the risk of giving away our argument prematurely, demands an answer in the introductory stages of the interpretation. The answer is contained within the texts, and in a way that does not require a specific interpretation. However, we would know more about the Titans had the epic poem Titanomachy, ‘the war of the Titans’, been preserved in the version attributed to Eumelus of Corinth or Arctinus of Miletus, or to one of the post-Homeric poets. The validity and influence of the works of archaic literature, of the mythological epic poems, are given all the more consideration here, since most of the Titans were not worshipped in Greece. Hesiod showed us how Greek narratives were influenced by the gods through such poems, and the limits of this influence, through a work of almost canonical status. And I use ‘almost’ to precisely delimit the relevance and influence, and ‘canonical’ to point out that this cannot be a matter of the transmission of free poetry – since this would be impossible for both temporal and material reasons – but rather of poetry,

though not limitlessly poetic, even if it is not a transmission of Greek but Eastern origin. To ‘canonise’ successful poets, endowed with unique and enduring narratives of powerful influence, which, however, considered as inventions of their own, not had been intended
‘canonise’. Anyone who assumes that these are purely inventions or poetic innovations, as is common in modern poetry, should provide specific evidence for each individual case.8

In Hesiod, a limit to the influence of Greek mythology through the Titanomachy is evident in the fact that he would never have accepted the archaic genealogy of Uranus, the unaccepted descent of the god ‘sky’ from a celestial father Aither (‘celestial light’ according to the Titanomachy), from Akmon,
‘Anvil’, according to an unknown ancient source, which had by no means become commonplace among the Greeks. According to Hesiod, the Greek poet who ‘canonised’ most successfully after Homer, a change of this nature in the genealogy of the gods would scarcely have been credible. Hesiod had managed to understand –with success
‘canonical’ – which could express the Greeks’ mythological worldview through genealogy.9 And this is the answer his *Theogony* provides to our question: the Titans were gods – the earlier gods, *proteroi theoí* (424). The Primordial Mother Gaia, the earth, had begotten them with her firstborn son, Uranus. As gods and as sons of the sky, they belonged to the divine-celestial pole of the two cosmological realms. However, almost all of them ended up beneath the earth, that is, in the deepest abyss of the earth, beneath Tartarus, a place where no worship could reach them. They are given the epithets chthónioi, the
‘underworld dwellers’ – including proleptic terms (697), anticipating their later fate – or else hypotartarioi (851), in accordance with the Iliad (14, 279) and, for the most part, also with the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (336). However, when they emerged, as they did for the slaying of the infant Dionysus in the Orphic-mythological poem by Onomachrus, a 6th-century theologian, they joined those daimones to whom the Pythagoreans assigned the middle realm.

But not all met this fate, and certainly not their sisters, the great heavenly daughters. There were six of them, just as there were six Titans, thus completing, according to Hesiod and perhaps as early as the *Titanomachy*, the celestial number of twelve. As to whether they too – and which of them – took

part in the war of the Titans, tradition remains silent. The conflict and the defeat of the Titans respond to the inner polarity of ‘son of heaven-underworld’ inherent in their figure, a strange characteristic which they embody. In those where this polarity does not operate but rather periodicity, as is the case with the Titaness Phoebe, to name but one – whose name surely means ‘moon goddess’ – there was no need whatsoever for struggle or defeat. The names of the Titans and Titanides, the Titanides, best encapsulate those of mere deities who were defeated by other gods. The others, ‘those who descended from Cronus’ (Theogony 630, and elsewhere) –Zeus, his brothers and sons– represent in this worldview solely the ruling minority, as a fragment of the ‘iron sky’ upheld by a Titan as visible as the Sun (Empedocles fr. 38) and a Titaness as visible as the Moon (Apollonius, Argonautica 4.54).

The nature of the Titans is by no means limited to a single generation of ‘earlier gods’. The Próteroi theoí should be understood precisely as those ‘who had already been gods’ – before Zeus and his family of Olympian deities. Most of them fought against Zeus and his followers, and suffered defeat, whilst others, such as Oceanus and Tethys, retained their rank and dignity, and still others – such as the most luminous pair of Titans, Hyperion and Theia, in Helios and Selene, the Sun and the Moon – were perpetuated in their descendants. A lineage which, in Hesiod, also expresses an affinity in their nature. The affinity in their nature between Iapetus, the Titan with the strangest name, and his descendants – which in this case is kinship in their titanic quality – means that the Theogony also reflects the fact that among his sons – not counting Atlas, Prometheus and Epimetheus – there is another, less well-known figure, of whom we shall also speak later: Menecius (510). A true embodiment of what it means to be a Titan – despite not being a son of the heavens, but a grandson of the heavens – described as such, and suffers the fate of most Titans: Zeus, annoyed by his atasthlie and such a petulant masculinity (enorée hyperoplos), hurls his thunderbolt at him and hurls him down to Erebus, into the eternal darkness of the underworld (514–16), the hybristes.

WHAT IS ‘TITANIC’ IN THE GREEK CONCEPTION?

Hybristes and atasthalíe are terms that are difficult to translate, but clear in their meaning and interdependence (Iliad 13.633–34). They highlight violent and boundless insolence in general, and that of the Titans in particular. In a passage from the Theogony, in which Hesiod specifically describes the Titans as atasthalíe (209), it becomes clear that he must then explain the name 'Titan' using etymological devices, as on its own it was neither transparent nor comprehensible to the Greeks. We find ourselves in the same situation as in the Odyssey, when the grandfather Autolycus is called upon to name his grandson Ulysses (19.406). This name too, from the perspective of Homeric and post-Homeric language, is only transparent in an apparent sense, and Autolycus, employing the arts of popular etymology – as this linguistically incorrect procedure is termed today – must strive to intensify that apparent transparency. Their father Uranus named the Titans, and their etymologies – deriving from titainein, 'to exert', and tisis, 'retribution', resulting in the 'effort' of the Titans—are false. Nevertheless, they characterise the nature of the Titans, as it was understood by the Greeks in Hesiod's time. The introductory question 'Who were the Titans?' must therefore be developed into the question: 'What is "Titanic" in the Greek conception?'

Hubris and atastalia, excessive pride and violence – or put another way, if you prefer – were just as uncharacteristic of the Titans as 'their swaggering masculinity', which in late antiquity – a misinterpretation of the etymology of titainein – led to them being regarded as priapic gods. The two words handed down to us, titax and titéne, phonetically related to 'Titan', also had to be explained to Greek readers when they appeared in poetic texts: one in the form of 'king' and the other as 'queen', meanings not far removed from those of 'earlier gods' and 'sons of heaven'. From the moment the names of the gods belonging to the victorious Olympian family are read, because they are inscribed on monuments from the Mycenaean period – or Crete in the Late Minoan period – it is no longer acceptable to continue speaking of the Titans as if they were nothing more than their predecessors in worship, and their defeat—a feature common to all known stories concerning the Titans—did not represent a mythological way of expressing the changes that had taken place in historical religions. Many accounts confirm that the name 'Titans'—as we can read it

in Walter F. Otto as well –10 'only acquired the meaning of savage, obstinate or even malevolent through its contrast with the Olympians, to whom the Titans never surrendered without a fight'. No trace of the latter has actually been found. It is more likely that the veneration of Pallas Athena and Hera – two sublime goddesses under the rule of Zeus – can be traced back to the Bronze Age,11 or even to the Neolithic period.12 On the other hand, the cult of one of the Titanides is indeed attested in the Mycenaean documents from Pylos: Theia Mater, whom Pindar still glorified eight hundred years later.13

We have already mentioned the uniqueness of the Titan Iapetus's name. He and Cronus – a name which, viewed from our knowledge of Greek, does not seem entirely clear either – are presented in the Iliad (8.479) as the two great figures who came to embody the mythological motif of the Titans. Nothing here reveals the cult or the evolution of the cult within Greece itself, but various signs point to mythology, with a historical backdrop encompassing peoples and kingdoms.14 Asia Minor was the setting for major and historic shifts in the pantheon, which were linked to revolutionary changes in earthly power. Accounts of struggles between gods in the multilingual Hittite kingdom, with preserved text fragments containing names of gods of diverse linguistic origins, reveal points of contact with the Greek versions of the history of the Titans. However, they appear to be worlds apart in terms of the fundamental features and the central motif of Hesiod's account: Mother Earth's will to give birth to everything.15 A mythological motif of dethronement, in which only male deities participate, unfolds among the Hittites over four generations. In it, the god corresponding to the Greeks' Uranus also had a male predecessor: a feature omitted by Hesiod, but which was acknowledged by the Titanomachy.16 This is the simplified history, transformed into mythology, of the successive empires of the Near East prior to the first millennium BC, also known to the Greeks through tales, or perhaps epic poems, in a masculine key and characterised by man's aggressive spirit.

The mutual threat posed by such celestial rulers was 'Titanic' according to the Greek conception. Through foreign mythological motifs, from the distance of that original sense of strangeness, the Greeks managed to formulate a clear idea that linked them to the names of the Titans

—though possibly already Mycenaean—17 which they could also recognise in their own ancient tales: in the stories of gods bearing the original characteristics of Homeric poetry, as well as in their archaic mythology, which had not been entirely superseded. These features also included the identification of great divine figures with celestial bodies, an identification—never again acknowledged by Homer—which nevertheless has its parallels in the Near East.

THE SUFFERINGS OF HERA

And there was more still: sensing danger and being in danger in the heavens was not limited solely to the Greek 'mythologising' of the extinct gods of the past. That which surrounds and circumscribes, the very world of the gods, the heavens—usually so implacable—is, in this respect, shown to be affected by the human condition. To conclude these preliminaries, which began with Goethe's Prometheus poems, and after referring to the Pythagoreans, Pindar and Hesiod, to reach the hymns to the Hittite gods, let us now recall a few lines from Homer's verses (Iliad 5. 392–94):

Hera suffered

when the violent son of Amphitryon

struck her in the right breast

with a three-pronged arrow;

and then, too, irremediable pain took

hold of her…

The goddess Dione comforts her daughter, Aphrodite, who has been wounded by Diomedes, with these words. She tells her of the painful wound inflicted on Hades, the god of the underworld, by Heracles himself with his arrow, but she also tells her

of his healing on Olympus at the hands of the physician Paeon, since vulnerability was as much an attribute of the gods as it was a feature of human existence.18 The difference between these two poles – mortality, by which man feels besieged, and the immortality that binds those gods – is immense. A god can inflict harm and is vulnerable, can heal and be healed: man can wound and be wounded; as a physician he can heal, and as one who is wounded he can also be healed, but as a man he is incurable. However, in the verses cited, something similar is curiously stated regarding Hera. In a translation by Voss, the goddess's irremediable pain is mitigated by an 'almost', which does not appear in Homer:

τλῆ δ᾽Ἥρη, ὅτε μιν κρατερὸς πάϊς Ἀμφιτρύωνος

δεξιτερὸν κατὰ μαζὸν ὀιστῶι τριγλώχινι

βεβλήκει· then a pain seized him.

Homer and the post-Homeric poets certainly did not conceive of Hera's 'incurable pain' as something physical, but as an eternal offence, as Virgil affirms in his penetrating verse (Aen. 1. 36):

While Juno kept the eternal wound within her breast

(With an incurable wound in her heart, the divine Juno)

The poet was certainly not speaking of Hera's wound, to which Homer's verses referred. The plasticity of the wounded right breast and the lunar periodicity of the goddess's mythological joys and sorrows19 reveal to us the human mode of existence to which vulnerability originally pertains, and here it affects the environment and gives rise to the periodic depletion in the form of a wound. Pain would not exist from a non-mythological point of view, nor would it be appropriate to describe it as 'incurable': Damna tamen celeres reparant caelestia lunae, 'swiftly the moons repair their celestial wounds', nos says Horace (Carm. 4. 7. 13). The wounds, which are

are visibly repeated time and again, they merely become an irremediable pain from a human perspective.

In this way, no divine being comes as close to human existence as Hera, the moon goddess. Does not Prometheus, too, bear a wound that is renewed time and again? He is the only Greek deity who must free himself and save himself from a similar wound. Does this characteristic not bind him more closely to the even more wretched human race? This question does not necessarily imply the Christian demand for redemption and must still retain the Greek meaning attributed to it. Nevertheless, the inquiry can also be outlined, in a manner more anticipated than formulated; in the meantime, we shall seek the path through the classical texts towards this enigmatic and wounded god of Greek mythology, lacking redemption, yet already redeemed: above all with the aid of Hesiod's Theogony, and later also through other ancient sources, and, once these preparations are complete, through Aeschylus's Prometheus plays.

3. THE MYTHOLOGEM OF PROMETHEUS IN THE 'THEOGONY'

WHAT ARE THEOGONIES?

Greek mythology knows of no creator of the world. Instead of creation myths, it contains theogonies—stories of the births of the gods. Arranged one after another, as in Hesiod's Theogony, they form a series of epiphanies, in which the world appears in divine forms, from which it is constructed. The creator of the world is the poet, the one who poeticises it. A creation which, however, has only the meaning of artistic creation. To the extent that a creation of this nature leads to the construction of a
'world' in which one lives as the Greeks lived in the Homeric and Hesiodic world of Zeus, it seems more appropriate to use the word 'foundation' rather than to designate it as a 'creation'. For the foundations for doing so do not rest solely on man, on the creative and founding being of these worlds, but also on that which is iron-hard and vigorous, that with which not only an imaginary world is built, but one that may correspond to a subsisting 'order'. Through unions and separations, divine weddings and births, which constitute a mythological origin story – considered in its full context: a theogony from which the foundation of 'order' emerges, which in Greek is called cosmos.

THE WEDDING OF IAPETUS

At the very beginning of the unions and separations through which the reign of Zeus was established – for this is how the Greek world order might be described in mythological terms – the wedding of the Titan Iapetus also took place, according to Hesiod's Theogony. A name that cannot be interpreted in the Greek language: Iapetus, as we have already noted, sounds foreign. We first encounter it in Homer, when Zeus describes that place

of utter darkness, to which Hera might retreat in her painful ordeal (Iliad 8.478–81):

… for I care not for your wrath, nor even if

you should reach the farthest bounds of sea

and land,

where Iapetus and Cronus, settled

there, enjoy neither the rays

of the sun of Hyperion,

their son, nor of the winds,

for deep Tartarus surrounds them…

It is there that Zeus banished the Titans after their defeat. However, a transcendent lineage originates from the two Titans mentioned by Homer. The lineage of Cronus, together with his son Zeus and the latter's children, leads upwards, towards the eternal luminous sphere of the heavens. The lineage of Iapetus remains below, establishing temporality and determining the opposite pole to the state of the celestials: the destiny of men.

At the beginning of this lineage lies the marriage of Iapetus, the union of a divine couple, from whom Prometheus will be born (Theogony 507–512):20

To the young Oceanid with beautiful ankles, Iapetus

He took Clymene as his wife, and they shared the same

bed. She bore him Atlas, a man of mighty spirit, as her son,

and gave birth to the glorious Menoeceus and Prometheus,

skilful and rich in cunning, and Epimetheus of misguided

mind, who from the very beginning brought evil upon

enterprising men.

The mother, as we read in this fragment, was a daughter of Oceanus, and, like many of the great goddesses in Hesiod, bore the name of an Oceanid. She may well have once been the great mother of the Titans, Earth herself. Aeschylus, in his *Prometheus Bound*, gives her the name of one of the Titanides, Themis, a name which, however, must also be taken as identical to that of 'Gaia' (210). And when Prometheus's father is even said in one source to be Uranus,21 the god of the sky and husband of the earth, a relationship in which the mother is called Clymene, this name also becomes apparent in Hesiod. It matters not whether the meaning was 'she who attends' or 'the distinguished one'; the name belongs to the goddess of the underworld, who now appears, in Hesiod, in the chorus of the daughters of Oceanus. Originally, Prometheus's father was to have a great wife: either the Earth herself, or—though names such as Asia and Asope are cited—22 perhaps the matutine name of a great goddess, as we shall see clearly when we discuss Asia, the wife of Prometheus. Euphorion, the learned Alexandrian poet, even knew something of a strange birth story, in which Hera is the mother, and apparently begets Prometheus with a dark and impetuous son of the Earth, the giant Eurymedon (Scholiast on the Iliad 14.295).

THE BROTHERS OF PROMETHEUS

The brothers whom Hesiod attributes to Prometheus establish the sinister and painful dominion of this family. The poet does not fail to mention that Epimetheus was born 'to be the bane of labouring humanity from the very beginning' – and, considering the story extremely instructive, recounts it twice in his poems: Theogony, 570–612, and Works and Days, 60–105. He took as his wife the first woman, whom Zeus had fashioned to corrupt mankind, 'the beautiful evil one', thereby becoming the first to suffer the consequences himself. But the situation is very

strange. For because of Epimetheus's imprudence, humanity was to be punished: punished – another oddity – because of Prometheus's cunning actions. At a time when men were not even considered the human race, but were at most regarded as the male gender, because the first woman, that 'beautiful evil one', was none other than Pandora! In Hesiod's poetic catalogue of names, it was said that she was supposedly the mother of a primordial father of the human race, Deucalion.23 However, according to this account, Deucalion's father was not Epimetheus, but Prometheus. So he too – one might ask, almost ironically – who was so careful? But such irony would have little justification in the face of the vestige of an archaic mythological motif. Rather, one might ask: did Prometheus and Epimetheus originally form a hermaphroditic being, the primordial man, who, with this primordial woman, would beget the human race?24

The names Prometheus and Epimetheus are clearly linked linguistically. If the former refers to 'he who knows beforehand', then the latter surely means 'he who learns afterwards'; both names are formed from the root of the verb manthάno, and from quite archaic times, since the ending -eus is characteristic of ancient proper names, and later there is no longer a methe alongside mathos, as there is a lethe alongside lathos. They are thus also defined by their transparency and, rather than being the original names of mythological beings, seem to refer to early interpretations: interpretations close to the tale of the unequal brothers, a purely human or humanised story, the dissemination of which is very widespread. Prometheus also had other, less transparent names, and these – which we shall learn about later – could be the original ones. Furthermore, the cunning Prometheus, compared to Zeus, as the unfolding of his story in Hesiod shows us, is one of those who learns the hard way. His mindset is described with the same epithet as that of the Titan Cronus, another who, like him, only appears intelligent and succumbs to Zeus. Both, in their tortuous (ankylos) way of thinking, are ankylometai, yet they are trapped in their own net (ankyle): a mode of thinking which, according to its archetype mentioned first, can undoubtedly only be described as 'titanic'. And all manner of tortuous paths befit him, from lies and deceit to the most ingenious inventions, the precondition for which, however, is always indicative of a deficiency in the way of life of the cunning. This imperfection drives

to the Titans, bringing them down to human levels, and grounding them in humanity as a reality of the world. These limitations are clearly highlighted by Epimetheus, whether he was originally a single hybrid being or formed a pair of mythological twins with Prometheus: in his figure, stupidity burst forth as the counterpart to cunning.

Menecio, cited by Hesiod as one of Prometheus's brothers, is characterised in the Theogony solely as the violent primordial Titan and son of the earth in his capacity as a giant: who in other times, by the name – 'he who awaits Oitos, mortal fate' – might also have been the 'pristine mortal'. The fatality that befalls him as the son of Iapetus is his father's destiny, as recorded in the Theogony (514–16):

To the insolent Menecius, Zeus of wide-ranging gaze

to Erebus, hurling him with a blazing thunderbolt

because of his recklessness and his proud virility.

Even more decisive is the punishment of Atlas, the brother mentioned first, who is also described here (517–20):

Atlas holds up the vast sky by a mighty decree

at the ends of the earth, facing the sweet-voiced Hesperides, lifting it

with his head and his tireless hands;

for this task was granted to him by the wise Zeus.

A painful fate and burden, consisting in the fact that the separation of heaven and earth makes the alternation of day and night possible, and it is only through this separation that 'time' is established. Atlas is no mere brother of Prometheus. His way of thinking is described in the Odyssey (1.52): there he is called oloóphron, an epithet expressing all his cunning and dangerousness, and

which in a sense encapsulates all the adjectives with which Hesiod describes Prometheus. His situation – both a role and a punishment – on the western edge of the Greek worldview corresponds exactly to that of a punished Prometheus on the eastern edge, and, through images of struggle and suffering, frames the sphere of human existential temporality. This unquestionable parallelism presents itself to Hesiod so conclusively that he then abruptly continues the mythological theme of Prometheus with the account of his punishment and cruel binding to a pillar carried out by Zeus himself, a scene credible in the Titanomachy but unthinkable in Homer (521–22):

He bound the most shrewd Prometheus with unbreakable

fetters, with intricate bonds fastening him to the middle of a

pillar;25

and then he speaks of Prometheus's wound, which is renewed time and again, with which the eagle sent by the king of the gods tortures him (523–24):

And against him he sent an eagle with outstretched wings;

it devoured his immortal liver, and it grew back just as much in every part.

PROMETHEUS'S WOUND

To enquire about the superhuman exemplarity and the circumstances of this wound in a god is as coherent as having taken an interest in Hera's wound. Prometheus's wound will seem no less evident to us than that wound in the breast, which, in the fading moonlight, month after month, reappears before our eyes. The wound was inflicted upon the goddess Hera by the darkness. In Prometheus's case, the opposite occurred. With the liver, which in the mythological motif of Prometheus regenerated during the night, certain peoples of the Antiquity practised their auguries, the hepatoscopy, also

known to the Greeks, a form of divination embodying a worldview, which was read in the night sky.26 Its colour is dark – and the eagle feeds on its darkness, according to Aeschylus (Prometheus Bound 1025) – and equally nocturnal, insofar as it corresponds to the seat of the passions. Zeus's eagle, on the other hand, appears by day to devour the liver: something that is little more than a metaphor for the Sun, for Zeus's 'bird', as Aeschylus once puts it (Hik. 212). This affliction – which even by day is interpreted as the suffering of darkness – seems to predestine Prometheus for the realm of darkness.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus's liberation from his wounds and indeed from his vulnerability – stripping a nocturnal god of his nocturnality – perhaps represents the transformation of an archaic conception of the world, in which the celestial process itself takes on greater significance than that of suffering, the mythological expression of this process in the heavens, perpetuating and undermining the darkness: a variation in which human existence, the gentle antithesis to the relentless heavens, gains in importance. 'Suffering' and 'darkness' are shown to be so intertwined in human existence that in all the events in which it participates – whether active or passive in appearance – they occur in the form of ordeals. Hesiod already speaks to us of liberation, of the death of the eagle, but his concern is not for the suffering, but for the total domination of Zeus, of that paternal order which rests upon the maternal will (526–34):

But the strong son of Alcmene, with his beautiful ankles,

Heracles slew her; he delivered the son of Iapetus

from wretched misfortune and freed him from his

torments

not without the will of Olympian Zeus who rules on

high, so that the glory of Heracles, born in Thebes,

might be even greater than before upon the very fertile

earth.

In doing so, he honoured his most distinguished son;

and though angered, he appeased the wrath he had previously felt

because he vied with the mighty Cronus for power.

THE FEATS OF PROMETHEUS

Thus, right from the start we know the end of the story: the reconciliation of Zeus with Prometheus. Only then does the account of Prometheus's exploits begin, which were to lead to the definitive separation of the divine and the human, and to the establishment of the human way of life. These were two original feats: the invention of sacrifice and the theft of fire. Here Hesiod had fundamental themes to recount, to integrate primordial mythological events into the construction of his world of Zeus. Let us continue reading and take every word in the most literal sense of the Greek text (535–706):

Moreover, when the gods and mortal men were deliberating at

Mecona, he took a great ox, having cut it up with a benevolent heart,

and placed it before them to deceive the mind of Zeus.

For he kept the meat and the fatty entrails in a skin, covering

them with oxen's belly.

On the other hand, the white bones of the ox, arranging them

skilfully with cunning, he concealed by covering them with

glistening fat. Then the father of men and gods spoke to him:

'Son of Iapetus, most distinguished among all lords,

O friend, how you have divided the parts with partiality!"

So said Zeus, mockingly, knowing the designs of the
immortals, and Prometheus, of devious mind, replied,
barely smiling, yet not forgetting his cunning technique:
“Zeus, the most glorious, the greatest of the ever-existing gods, take from this whatever your heart’s desire urges you to take.”
He spoke, plotting deceit; but Zeus, who knows the designs of the
immortals, perceived and did not overlook the treachery; he saw the evil
schemes in his heart against mortal men, which he was about to carry
out.
With both hands he lifted the white ointment.
He was enraged within, and wrath filled his spirit, when he
saw the white bones of the ox in that treacherous scheme.
That is why, for the immortals upon the earth, the race of men burns the
white bones on altars perfumed with incense.
And Zeus, who gathers the clouds, spoke to him in great anger:
‘Son of Iapetus, knower of all that pertains to the designs of the
gods.
‘O friend, you have not forgotten your cunning trick!’
So said Zeus, irate, the knower of the immortals’ designs.
Then afterwards, ever mindful of this deceit, he withheld
from the ash trees the power of the tireless fire for mortal
men who live upon the earth.

But the valiant son of Iapetus deceived him,

by stealing the glow visible from afar of the tireless fire into a

hollow splint; his chest was deeply torn

of Zeus, who resounds on high, and his heart was angered,

when he saw the glow of the fire among the men, visible from afar.

And straightaway, instead of fire, he prepared a calamity against mankind.

THE PRIMORDIAL SACRIFICE

As a prerequisite for this account, it must be assumed that the state of separation between gods and humans, of the 'entirely divided power', as Pindar calls it, had not yet come to pass. This – this κεκριμένα δύναμις – came about when the gods and mortal men (ἐκρίνοντο) compared themselves at Mecona: 'compared themselves' in the sense of
'separating' and 'differentiating'. Here we certainly have a pre-mythological
A 'resolution' that is consistent with the Greek mythological worldview, which has already been shaped by that resulting polarity. This is why Mecona, the place where this decision is made, occupies a special sphere. Geographically, this place of poppies (from μήκων, poppy) must have been situated in the region of the Peloponnesian city of Sicyon, near Corinth, and mythologically it must have been in the realm of the goddesses of the poppies, Demeter and Persephone. Both interpretations may be correct, and it is possible that Mecona was a Sicyonian place of worship for Demeter and Persephone, and in Hesiod's time it was said that the famous decision had taken place there. The paradox is that the setting for an initial event leading to our world is located within this very world; however, such paradoxes occur in all cosmogonic mythological themes, since mythologisation always employs elements that are concrete, pre-existing components, even when seeking to explain the genesis of the world, its creation or foundation.

The creation and the first offering of a religion's characteristic sacrifice can in fact be seen as the act of creation of the world, or at least as the founding act of the prevailing order in the world. If we were to draw parallels – which would be a mere game compared to the difficult task of making the testimonies speak clearly and anew – the history of religion would immediately offer us clear examples of the essential, particularly from the history of religion in India. Even the sacrifice of the Christian Mass can be conceived of only as a founding act of the Christian world order. The moment Christ's action at the Last Supper acquired the significance of an archetypal ritual act, it took the form of the founding sacrifice and became the great sacrifice upon which the world of salvation would be founded. However, this example is cited solely for the contrast it represents: the sacrifice of the founding of the Christian world had to possess the meaning of reconciliation, the resolution of tension, the levelling out, in a sense, of the difference between God and man. This contrasts with the very different act of Prometheus, which, according to the narrator's criteria, must explain how it is possible that in certain Greek sacrifices intended for the celestial inhabitants, the gods received the more attractive, though less valuable, portion.27

Hesiod merely needed to hint at the exemplary nature of Prometheus's act as a foundational sacrifice: this was self-evident in a world where the gods received the fat and bones, whilst the sacrificers themselves obtained the bulk of the meat and entrails of the sacrificed animal. A curious way of dividing things up! Whilst each division presupposed a common whole—with a community of distributors alongside a common good to be shared—it also gave rise to another premise of division: the distinction between those who share. The idea of the Greek sacrifice encompasses both: the distinction and the community of gods and men. Hesiod attributed this idea to the compensatory and pacifying effect of the Golden Age.28 The foundation of sacrifice becomes the founding act upon which our world is sustained, and within it, through a competition that accentuates the difference entailed by separation. Thus was the world conceived after the separation, a world with an absolute distinction between gods and men. The fairness of this differentiation, according to Hesiod, lies in the fact that men are just as they appear in their role as sacrificers: deceivers who are themselves deceived. Even if Hesiod had not based his

a mythological worldview within a tradition, but rather in a teaching derived from Greek sacrifice; even then, that worldview would have been founded on a concept of legitimacy that is inherent in human nature.

PRE-HESIODIC ELEMENTS IN HESIOD

However, Hesiod's account contains peculiarities which, from the outset, show us how dependent it was on mythological traditions, which he first had to adapt to the structure of Zeus's world. The first premise of the story of the separation was already quite strange: the primordial undivided state, the absence of any absolute distinction between gods and men. Another peculiarity, to which we shall return, is the tacit equating of the cause of men with that of Prometheus. 'Long ago, when gods and mortal men stood in opposition…', thus begins the account, which continues with Prometheus (and not with men!) cutting up the ox. Prometheus initiates the challenge and competes with the gods. But men, once again, are the ones who must suffer for their defeat. When he still makes common cause with them and steals fire for the human race (Hesiod interprets this intervention as if it were such an obvious fact that he barely comments on or reasons about it), Epimetheus, by way of punishment, receives the first woman. That is to say, the very same oddity that has already been noted when Epimetheus is first mentioned. Nevertheless, both oddities – on the one hand, the persistent indivisibility of the Prometheus-Epimetheus-humanity group, and on the other, the original indivisibility of gods and men – cancel each other out when a certain situation arises: the assumption that there had once existed a mythological motif in which the two brothers, or the primordial being Prometheus-Epimetheus, in their capacity as divine representatives, precursors or ancestors of humanity, faced only the celestial gods: when only the gods were pitted against one another, gods not yet fragmented in their divinity, or who were unaware of their differences. And this seems to have been precisely the pre-Hesiodic situation.

The inclusion in the Hesiodic account of the confrontation and separation of 'mortal humans' is neither conditioned nor required by the content, but by the form. The manner of expression, in itself, is already

purely conventional: as soon as men are mentioned in epic language, they become those 'who dwell upon the earth in all its breadth' (ὅ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσιν). In reality, they are named only as those of Mecona, a place that would later become a site of worship, as belonging to that world – the origin of which, incidentally, we must still consider –; although referring to them in a way that was easily understood, whilst at the same time abstracting them consistently and entirely, might prove impossible. The existence of the 'gods and men' dichotomy is inherent to the clarity of the Greek world. Not even Xenophanes, the philosophical and archaic prophet of a single God, whose existence excludes all other gods and admits of no comparison whatsoever with mortals, could renounce this dichotomy in his modes of expression. The epic language and worldview of this language imposed inconsistency upon him. 'There is only one God' (εἷς θεός), as he puts it in his famous phrase, 'the greatest among gods and men' (ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος). Our translation speaks of men as 'unhappy', employing an interpretative approach introduced in modern times: μελέοισι, whereas in the manuscripts one could read instead μελίηισι, 'ash trees', or perhaps even better μελίοισι, 'ash-men'. From the ashen wood of the ash tree, according to Works and Days, Zeus created the man of the Metal Age: not a true creation of man, but the shaping of an entire lineage of humanity and, through it, of an era of the world. In the Theogony, mention is made only of the emergence of the Meliae, the nymphs of the ashen ash tree, born of Uranus's blood – those who needed no fire –;29 and as for men, they simply already existed when Prometheus, before a community of interests that had not been created specifically for that purpose, depicted them in the most obvious manner.

The 'gods-men' polarity of the Greek worldview is the prerequisite for the scene described, accepted and explained, yet devoid of any other function. Prometheus and Zeus face each other alone, as two primordial mythological beings, not by virtue of human psychology, but simply because of who they are and their inability to be any different. Prometheus, the cunning one, by his very nature, with the existential imperfection of the skilful, and with his
'tortuous way of thinking', gave the struggle its direction, even without having provoked it. When he responds to Zeus's recriminations, it is he

that, of all the gods, he most resembles Hermes: ἦ᾽ ἐπιμείδησας,
with an indulgent smile! But if the deception, originating in creative art, in Hermes enriches the divinity of the world with playful-magical opportunities,30 the fundamental imperfection of Prometheus, in his original deception, causes other serious deficiencies.

THE SPIRIT OF ZEUS

Through Zeus's strange behaviour, Hesiod sheds a brilliant light on the imperfection of Prometheus's way of being and acting. Zeus not only appears to him 'full of eternal counsel' (ἄφθιτα μήδεα εἰδώς) – so described, emphatically and repeatedly – but the scene is constructed in such a way that it explicitly highlights from the outset that this is his
'spirit', the νοῦς (noks) of Zeus. The epithet applied to this noks, that of perfect reflection, in the Iliad (15.56i) is πύκινος, 'dense'; nothing can escape it.31 Prometheus, by virtue of having sought to 'deceive the spirit of Zeus', will be distinguished as the one who necessarily remains imperfect, the one who will never achieve success. 'Zeus, full of eternal counsel, discovers the ruse and takes it into consideration.' Through deception, he allows himself to be swindled – once again in a manner characteristic of the Titanomachy, but not in the manner of Homer, rather in the archaic style
'titanic' – but not that he is deceived. Given his noks, which stands above all else, that would be impossible, since his spirit is precisely like a mirror, which in itself perceives everything without distortion and reproduces it passively. It contains the whole and unshakeable being, with actions – both good and bad, along with their consequences – and that is why it knows no desire nor does it require change.32 And so Prometheus himself is reflected; he is presented to us with the futility of desiring variations, of wanting to act without being endowed with the noks of Zeus, a being who, in his imperfect existence, clearly cannot bear to be as he is.

ANALOGY IN WORKS AND DAYS

We do not perceive an abrupt transition when suddenly the repercussions of Prometheus's crime upon humanity are discussed. Men resemble Prometheus in this respect. They too would like to be, through cunning and ingenuity, that which is not reflected in their spirit, and not what they must endure. Hesiod explains to us in *Works and Days* what it would be like if this were not the case, where he likewise celebrates this victory of Zeus (42–59):

For the gods have hidden sustenance from men; you would

surely work comfortably in a single day

enough to last a year, even whilst idle; straightaway you

would hang the yoke upon the smoke,

and the labours of the oxen and the toiling mules would come to an

end.33 But Zeus concealed it, enraged in his heart,

when Prometheus, with his devious mind, deceived him;

therefore he devised wretched torments for mankind.

And he hid the fire; then the valiant son of Iapetus

stole it for mankind from beside prudent Zeus

in a sharp turn, escaping from Zeus, the thunderer. And

Zeus, who gathers the clouds, spoke to him in anger: 'Son

of Iapetus, wiser than all others,

you rejoice in having stolen the fire and having deceived my heart great

sorrow for yourself and for men to come.

For to these, instead of fire, I shall give a curse, so that all

may rejoice in their hearts, cherishing their own misfortune.

It is only through the creation of ‘evil itself’ – woman – over which all must rejoice, that Zeus’s victory becomes absolute. The severe order of Zeus’s world is based both on the Epimethean-masculine predilection for women and on that state – according to Hesiod’s firm conviction – which is Promethean and human, and which was presented to us simultaneously: the yearning for a shrewd and ingenious conception of being. The image is not clear, because the exact relationship between Prometheus and humanity, which in Hesiod is established through mythological transmission, eludes the modern reader. The daily suffering of a nocturnal being and the noble act of stealing fire encompass a core that is exceedingly human – which, according to the Greek conception, became titanic. And the question we anticipated, as a motto and preamble to the interpretation formulated by Goethe, after reading Hesiod is all the more justified: that being who is so close to humanity, what is it? Is he a god, a Titan, a man? Aeschylus explicitly defines him as a god, and the three great tragic poets regarded him as a Titan.34 But if we seek an even more precise definition of Prometheus, we might find it in the tradition found in prose.

4. THE ARCHAIC MYTHOLOGY OF PROMETHEUS

‘THE HERALD OF THE TITANS’

What aspect of Prometheus’s character might we contrast with the nature of Zeus? To what kind of being was he intrinsically linked? He was as much a force for the corruption as for the salvation of humanity – as the bringer of fire and the sustainer of existence. But in what capacity was the corrupter and sustainer venerated? We find a kind of answer in the Greek lexicographer Hecataeus, a collector of glosses, expressions and unusual terms used in ancient texts to define the word Ithas. Thus, according to him, Prometheus was called ‘the herald of the Titans, whom others knew as Ithax’. When one considers the text in which Prometheus appears under these names – perhaps because the same word is read differently – and also as the herald of the Titans, in accordance with our knowledge of the epic Titanomachy (already outlined, in part), there is scarcely any possibility of an answer other than the gloss arising from that work or from one of them, should there be several with similar content. These are not, however, self-explanatory names, nor do they carry the weight of an irrefutable interpretation. Whilst Ithas recalls ithagenes, a Greek word translated by Hecataeus as autóchthon, Ithax recalls Ithake, the island of Ulysses, and Ithakos, the name of an artist who lived on the island, mentioned in the Odyssey (17.207). The idea also arises of a possible kinship with the figure of Ulysses of Ithaca himself, who displays the most Promethean character among all of Homer’s heroes. Ancient artists depicted the heads of both men, which bore the greatest resemblance to the cunning Hermes, with a striking similarity: both were covered with the pointed cap of the artist-craftsman – which, amongst the Homeric heroes, looked rather like a ridiculous headdress –[35], with which Hephaestus and the Cabiri also covered themselves.

‘Herald of the Titans’ may also signify something more than a kinship between the mindset of Prometheus – which we have hitherto described as titanic, particularly because of his connection with Cronus, the other ‘astute thinker’ – and that of

Hermes. (Ulysses, according to his genealogy, was even the grandson of that god.) Both elements had a compelling reason: the fact that he was a Titan, and that it was precisely he, of all the Titans, whom the poet had in mind, for alongside the ‘entrepreneur’ he also needed a herald for his narrative. The herald, κήρυξ, amongst the gods was Hermes. He held the office and possessed the character of the eternal wanderer who comes and goes, unifier of opposing realms – Olympus and Hades – a mediator who effectively floats between the realm of the dead and that of the Olympians. However, however much the world of the Olympian gods resembles that of humans in Homer’s account, this peculiar situation of Hermes can hardly be taken as a simple derivation from the human occupation of herald. Mortal heralds imitated the immortals, and derived confidence in their own office from the reality that Hermes presented to them. The divine world of the Titans, which we gradually come to understand through Eastern parallels, is largely savage, yet bears more resemblance to the astral than to the human. The names which, according to Greek tradition, are cited as names of Titans in Hesiod, are related to the sky, as is the case with Hyperion, corresponding to the Latin superior, meaning ‘the one above’; Koios, relating to Koia, ‘sphere’; and Krios perhaps representing the celestial ‘ram’. Hyperion, the father of Helios, is not the only one to bear a resemblance to the Sun; Cronus certainly does as well. Even if he certainly carried out his primal act in a bloody manner—that of separating the original parents with a sickle—the image of the young Moon—the act must be regarded as a solar one. Thus, the planet assigned to him, Saturn, is also known in Greek as Helios aster or ‘Star of the Sun’.36 Prometheus’s position as herald of the Titans, when compared with that of Hermes, can even less be attributed solely to human relations, since it also stems from relations with the heavens, and through this, it will shed even clearer light on the office and character of Hermes.

Prometheus, like the lunar Hera, bears a wound that is constantly renewed. No winter’s chill indicates this as clearly as that other wound which, intertwined with the human condition, can also be detected in the sky: the Sun’s wound. The perspective we are concerned with here—that which stems from human existence, and which in humans living today can be taken at any moment—sets our path of observation and interpretation apart from mythology

an ancient precursor to everything that had hitherto emerged as astral mythology or naturalist interpretation.37 Being wounded corresponds to the role of mediator in the figure of Prometheus, whilst the herald and the Moon – as seen from the human world – float together-at-the-centre, which defines a lunar essence. A being such as this is not comparable to the astronomical Moon, just as there is no figure that can extinguish it as a source of mythological possibilities. He was chosen as herald as the sole lunar figure amongst the astral gods. However, the Moon is as clear as it is dark, and Prometheus is part of the darkness. The night is healing to him, just as the day is always painful, which essentially distinguishes him from Hermes, the lunar herald among the Olympians. For although Hermes is also nocturnal, he is so because he belongs to the light radiated by the rising sun and life, without having to endure the darkness of existence. The more aware we become of the kinship between Prometheus and Hermes, the better we understand the commonality of their situation and their role in the world of the gods, and the more an abyss opens up before our eyes, separating these two lunar beings: Hermes – Olympian herald of the celestials – and Prometheus – a special Titan, herald of the Titans – to whom, for his part, humanity is assigned.

PROMETHEUS AND HERMES

The common trait shared by Hermes and Prometheus lies in the realm of primordial events—not those that are decisive or divisive, like those of Cronus, but rather the incisive and penetrating ones from which he has grown, events that wound the divine realm. Nevertheless, for human existence these are inevitable wounds from which life springs: something divine that reunites the wounding figures with the gods who had felt disturbed and insulted by the intrusion. The act of reunification constituted the sacrifice; a sacrifice necessarily preceded by two sacrilegious acts, which in the meantime disrupted the growing structure of the surrounding world. One sacrilegious and wounding, though representative of a beneficial primordial act to provide food through the slaughter of the animal, whose flesh was offered to the gods and to men in the gracious banquet of sacrifice. The other primordial act was the obtaining of fire, though for us it has more of fire sacred of the sacrifice than of belonging to the divine,

life-giver to living beings, to the growing elements of the surrounding world. This divinity of fire, its associated divinity in all that grows around man, life-giving, as a nutrient conditioned by theft or character-theft – by the irruptive character – as the conqueror of fire.

These two fundamental events, as well as the invention of sacrifice—which united, crowned and purified them both—are explained by both Prometheus and Hermes. Furthermore, there is a reference to a primordial man and founder of the human community of Argos: Phoroneus;38 and tradition expressly states that Prometheus was the first to kill a calf as a sacrificial animal.39 Hesiod does not state this so explicitly, and the theft of fire also makes sense outside this context: the killing of the animal—the theft of fire—the first sacrifice. He describes it as a new and beneficial sacrilege, despite all three being involved in the primordial sacred and sacrilegious benefit: the theft of fire from the gods to offer it to them.40 In this, however, another logical correlation remains unresolved: in the sacrifice, not only are the offerings necessary, but also the sacrificers, and in Hesiod, given the presupposition that men already exist, they are taken for granted. The meaning of this logical correlation remains intact in the Homeric hymn to Hermes: Hermes, the newborn who is instantly a dangerous god, steals Apollo's oxen, invents the method of kindling fire with a flint made of laurel wood, slaughters two oxen and institutes the sacrifice to the twelve gods, among whom he includes himself.41 Men in their capacity as sacrificers do not feature in this account, nor do they in the primordial sacrifice of analogous mythological motifs among other peoples. Here too, the sacrificers and the recipients of the sacrifice are frequently one and the same. This identity is not regarded as mystical in the account of the Hymn to Hermes, for the sacrifice was invented before men practised it. Hermes did not represent men; Prometheus did.

The close kinship that bound Prometheus to Hermes set him apart from the other Titans; he differed from Hermes in his close relationship with mankind, in the traits that corresponded to the human condition: in his punishment and his lot, in his marked arrogance as a sacrilegious figure combined with his role as the primordial sacrificer. Like a lunar being – this is how Prometheus appears before us – deprived of luminosity, personified in the opacity of the dark moon, which likewise bears the traits of

human existence. An inevitable transgression arising from his own lack in the face of those who have grown simultaneously and in the same environment; employing a sinuous way of thinking (just as the paths of that which is growing are tortuous by nature); inescapable characteristics for wounding and being wounded. His place in the world belongs to the phase of the new moon, that of a dark lunar nature, with the crescent rising – which in mythological tales also takes the form of an axe (which we see in Prometheus's hand). Women, those associated with various manifestations of Prometheus, precisely define his position in the sky.

THE WOMEN OF PROMETHEUS

Pandora will not be the subject of this study as she requires special consideration.42 Clymene, also referred to as the mother of Prometheus in Hesiod, is identified among other names as the great goddess of the underworld. Pronoe – aptly named alongside Clymene –43 embodies the conceptual feminine form of Prometheus, and represents 'she who foresees and takes precautions'. In his masculine form, as Pronoo, he appears in the genealogical tree of the ancestors of the Greeks, the Hellenes, who in turn descend from Prometheus,44 a name in which the pseudonym, the other name of Prometheus, is easily recognised; neither of the two are authentic names, but rather a paraphrase of the Titan Ithas or Ithax. Prometheus's 'place' is defined through an illustrative group of names: on the one hand, Celeno;45 on the other, Pyrrha, Asia and Hesione. Celeno means 'the dark one', Pirra is 'the reddish-blonde one', whilst Asia, had it not originally meant 'the eastern one' or 'the morning one' – or any other derivation of that sort – would never have become the name for the east or the east wind, for that which, as seen from Greece, was the East. Asia, like some earlier great goddesses, is included by Hesiod (Theogony 359) among the daughters of Oceanus, and by Hyginus among the Nereids, the daughters of the other ancient sea god. For his part, Herodotus (4.45.3) attests that this was the name of Prometheus's wife, and at the same time asserts that the Asian continent had taken its name from her and from no other. Under the same epithet, that of Athena Asia, she was worshipped in Laconia (Pausanias 3.24.7), with whom Prometheus, as we shall see very soon, maintained a close relationship. The name seems to have belonged to a divine lady, of

whose veneration, like that of Thei mater, is attested to in a Mycenaean document from Pylos.46 It is unlikely that the name Hesione – mentioned in *Prometheus Bound* (560) – was understood in antiquity as a synonym for Asia: though her connection with Troy is certainly true, as the daughter of the primordial king who, assisted by his helpful gods, had the famous Levantine city built.47 Dawn or darkness are invoked by these women's names. Darkness and dawn define the position of the crescent moon as it emerges from the darkness, which it nevertheless, in a certain sense, carries with it as an invisible complement. This is the 'place', the celestial backdrop of Prometheus. But no one should think that any phenomenon in the heavens could exhaust its essential content. The name Axiotea,48 that wife of Prometheus who has not yet been mentioned, links him to beings very different from the celestial ones. The first component of the name – an archaic cultic invocation: axios, 'venerable' – is characteristically found in Cabirian names: Axieros, Axiokersos, Axiokersa.

PROMETHEUS AMONG THE CABIRI

The connection between the Titans and the Cabiri is not limited to the figure of Prometheus. This is further attested by the Imbros inscription,[49] in which an invocation of the Cabiri lists the Hesiodic line of the great Titans, the sons of Uranus, with the exception of Oceanus: Ceus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus and Cronus. This is an extension of an equation established by the Orphic theologian and poet Onomachrus in the 6th century BC, with undoubted foundation and notable success, who attributed to the Titans the murder and mutilation of the infant Dionysus (Pausanias 8.37.5). Should we wonder why he did so, it is worth recalling that two Cabirian brothers, the elder ones, committed a similar murder against their younger brother.50 Primordial mythological crimes weigh heavily on both the name of the Titans and that of the Cabiri; however, the names of the Cabiri are also linked to mysteries: to rites of purification and consecration.51 In the founding legend of Cabirion – the sanctuary situated near Thebes – it is told that a city had previously existed in that place, inhabited by men who were named after the place, the Kabeiraioi (Pausanias 9.25.6). To one of those original inhabitants, to Prometheus and to his son Aitnaios, Demeter she brought the

mysteries. It marked the beginning of a lengthy, pseudo-historical narrative written in code, in the style customary of the mysteries: with pseudonyms applied to most of the participants, as transparent to the initiates as they are to us. Aitnaios, ‘the man of Etna’, can only be Hephaestus – in reference to his Sicilian mountain – regarded here as a Cabir, as he must undoubtedly have been considered on his own island, Lemnos, which formed part of the Cabir cult area. His Cabir descendants were even called
‘men of Hephaestus’: surely those Cabiri who carried the hammer and were smiths like him.

Thus, Prometheus—a figure of rather secondary importance among the Titans, who is merely the ‘son of Iapetus’ and best suited to the role of herald—is presented, as a father and ancestor, as the most venerable of all the Cabiri. His cult in Athens is no mere reflection of the same reverence shown towards Hephaestus. Together with Pallas Athena, these two gods form a triad venerated in the ancient sacred precinct of the Academy. An archaic depiction at the entrance to the sanctuary portrays Prometheus as the oldest god and Hephaestus as the youngest. This should not, however, lead us to believe that the more recent cult of Hephaestus in Athens was necessarily linked to that of Prometheus. Succession and hierarchy are not merely a matter for genealogists; they are a distinctive feature of Cabirian circles, represented in the cult by a powerful father and a reverent, even servile, son. Whilst Hephaestus appears in Athens alongside Prometheus as the younger son, in Lemnos it is the youth Cadmilo who takes this role.53 However, in the great Homeric epic, in which so many original elements of Greek religion are silenced, Prometheus is not mentioned, whilst Hephaestus is celebrated. Consequently, when, in a succession of archaic relationships, Hephaestus takes the position in which Prometheus appears, there is a possibility that he is presented solely as the successor to this particular and enigmatic Titan. The accuracy of our observations is borne out by the image on a 5th-century Attic vase, on which Prometheus can be seen standing before Hera, positioned side by side as a result of their mythological characteristics. This coincides with the rare – and perhaps even more secret – tradition that the poet Euphorion, one of the Alexandrian scholars, dared to expound: Hera was said to be the mother of Prometheus, whom the Giant Eurymedon, a son of the earth whose name means ‘he who reigns over a vast expanse’, had raped. But the tradition that regarded Hephaestus as the son particularly close to Hera became the standard one.

A similar situation arises in relation to Pallas Athena. Both, not only Prometheus but also Hephaestus, seem to have pursued her with their love.54 And there is yet another story, equally archaic, which makes it easy to guess which of the two originally belonged to the circle of Zeus's daughter: the story of the goddess's birth. Which of the two, Prometheus or Hephaestus, split open Zeus's head when Pallas Athena was about to be born from him? Both are mentioned.55 The original tool used was the axe. It was held in the hand of Hephaestus the hammerer to deliver the blow, unless he wielded his hammer and intervened in the act as a mere midwife. The axe seems to make more sense, whilst also being more illustrative, in the hand of Prometheus, the sacrificer: illustrative too in that new moon situation, to which the most important festivities of the goddess in Athens were linked.56 The primordial act was also tantamount to an inevitable atrocity, to cleaving and violently bursting into the most sacred: a sacred sacrilege, silenced by Homeric poetry, but referred to by Hesiod after eliminating the violent assistance of the midwife (Theogony 924). At the beginning of this meditation on Prometheus among the Cabiri, we already alluded to an even more horrifying sacred act carried out by the Cabiri themselves: two brothers are said to have cut off the head of a third brother and, to hide it, wrapped it in a purple cloth—a veiled mystery that must certainly have carried significant religious weight.

TITANS AND CABIRI

One might well ask: what is the significance of the fact that the same mythological beings are sometimes called 'Titans' and sometimes 'Cabiri'? When Onomachrus presented the Titans in place of the Cabiri, he did not precisely establish their identity. The Imbros inscription, which groups all the great Titans among the ranks of the Cabiri, and Photius's dictionary, in which the Cabiri are referred to without distinction as 'men of Hephaestus' or
'Titans', attest to the gradual standardisation of the original multiplicity. How far back did the starting point or reference point for this generalisation of living mythology extend? We learn this from the figure of Prometheus, who, for very special reasons inherent to his person, is as readily ascribed to the Titans as to the Cabiri. The Titans, in the conception of the world of Greek mythology – except for Oceanus, who for

Homer is still the ‘source of everything’, and only in Hesiod’s work is he a Titan among others – they belong to the celestial sphere. In the heavens, they are the oldest members, those who were there before the Olympian gods; this should not be understood as meaning that in Greece they were worshipped in preference to the Olympians themselves; according to our understanding of Greek cosmogony, they already enjoyed the role of being gods of the heavens before Zeus’s dominion over heaven and earth was established. They are the primordial beings, gods before the gods, with their home in the heavens, a plethora of stars, most of them strikingly solar, and, among them, a lunar Prometheus.

Of the Cabiri it can be stated with absolute certainty that, whilst they too are primordial beings, they belong rather to the other pole. According to the aforementioned account of the Cabirion near Thebes, they were primeval men. In the image on a well-attested vessel from the sanctuary, the primeval male representatives of the human race, Pratolaos and Mitos – ‘pristine man’ and ‘seed’—are depicted as primitive savage men before the great Dionysian Cabir and Pais, the boy who served him. How could one have spoken of an original city of Cabira and its inhabitants if the Cabiri could not have been regarded as primordial beings who were already men before they were men? Nevertheless, in his account of the legend, Pausanias states that he lacks permission to reveal who the Cabiri truly were. This can only be understood as a conformity to common tradition, in which the divinity of the Cabiri and the Titans is scarcely distinguishable. As gods, they belong to the dark sphere from which life originates; their pronounced virility made them—and this is why their primordial essence must be conceived with greater precision—ancestors of the male human species.

This is how Prometheus – alongside his brother Epimetheus, who is both excessively virile and simple-minded, and who, despite being merely human, represents the male human race in contrast to the luminous celestial beings – the dark one, the lunar being amongst the Titans, finds his rightful place in Greek mythology as one of the Cabiri. Gods such as Hermes and Hephaestus, both of whom are also Cabiri – Hermes being regarded as an equivalent of Pais and Cadmus – consolidate for the son of Iapetus that position at the human pole opposite the world of the gods, which in non-Greek mythology is occupied by a primordial divine man.

5. INTERMEZZO IN THE HISTORICAL COURSE OF SCIENCE

WHAT CAN BE RECONSTRUCTED

A mythological creation, including one as singular as that of the herald of the Titans, Ithax, one of the Cabiri, also known as Prometheus, who, according to his dominant character trait, is as much lunar darkness as he is a vessel brimming with humanity, may reappear in the spirit – in that which pursues the traces of the once mythologising spirit. For the ancient cosmos, defined by two poles – that of man and his environment, and that of the bond linking them to the 'world' – still exists. It is the world of man, which in this intertwining radiates itself: it radiates through mythological figures that are envisioned, dreamt of and poeticised. The transmissions of such figures take on a dual component for us: the 'what' present in the divine figures or in the mythological motifs already formed, in which it is always shown in a certain way, and, without being able to be separated from them, it also announces a form of presentation, the
the 'how' of representation. The 'what' is the myth. The myth is also a work, insofar as it is an object represented in a specific form – for, even if there are countless forms, the 'how' must be present in one of them.57 Everything that has existed can be reconstructed as a singular Greek work – and not just once, but repeatedly, in many works – but only by taking the 'what' as a reference: insofar as it contains a fragment of the 'world' that addresses us in human terms. The more the created work predominates over the fragment of the 'world', the more fully formed it becomes, the more it turns into a consciously artistic creation, and the less it can be reconstructed from mere clues.

THAT WHICH CAN BE KNOWN

We must now turn our attention to Aeschylus's other dramatic works, of which only *Prometheus Bound* has survived in its entirety. For us, the comparative literature on this tragedy begins with Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker. This distinguished mythologist and philologist published, over a century ago, a substantial volume: *Die Aeschylische Trilogie Prometheus und die Kabirenweihe zu Lemnos nebst Winken über die Trilogie des Aeschylus überhaupt* [Aeschylus's trilogy of Prometheus and the Consecration of the Cabiri at Lemnos, with notes on Aeschylus's trilogy in general], Darmstadt, 1824. In this work, he attempted to reconstruct the full content of most of Aeschylus's trilogies. Two years later he published a new, no less voluminous book, entitled: Nachtrag zu der Schrift über die Aeschylische Trilogie nebst einer Abhandlung über das Satyrspiel [Supplement to the treatise on Aeschylus's trilogy, together with a dissertation on the satyr play], Frankfurt, 1826. The second work was intended primarily to refute the criticisms levelled against the first volume. Welcker set a precedent, for since then there has been no end to attempts at philosophical reconstructions, which in turn are criticised for overstepping the bounds of what can actually be ascertained. A school to which we shall pay little attention, for far from addressing what is important to humans, or even what might be acceptable, it draws primarily on those subjects about which it is impossible to know anything, let alone prove anything. The invention of 'formal laws' to make the impossible possible, to rediscover what is definitively lost forever, does not even merit a refutation. Even the use of observations regarding the reconstruction of the trilogies – observations only possible on the basis of the sole trilogy preserved in its entirety, the Oresteia – are mere literary pastimes. And all the conclusions that are sought to be established today, based on the fragmentary lists of plays and grammatical notes relating to the catalogue of poems performed since Thespis, are likewise without foundation.

All we can know about the performances that took place on stage is what we read in the dramatic texts that have been handed down to us, in quotations from plays, and in those fragments of papyrus that have been preserved and refer to them. It is a kind of blessing and fortune that the discovery of the papyri, of the

remarkable discoveries of ancient texts, the very existence of which was still beyond imagination in Goethe's time. Thoroughly examining all that had been handed down in an attempt to reconstruct it was, in those days, the very best that could be attempted, and it was certainly Welcker who undertook this most commendable task. We, however, were called upon to go back to a richer and more concrete reality of antiquity, through a more sensory and tangible tradition, which previously would have been unthinkable.58 We were compelled to read a great deal of new material, not only the fragments of papyri, but we also had to evaluate the archaeological finds, and above all we had to interpret the images on the vases. It was these that most insistently suggested to us the world that would unfold before us. It is not only the forms that we now understand better, but also the content. The formal characteristics we usually look for in texts, in order to glean subtle clues about something we cannot actually know, often depend on a chance occurrence in the transmission, and become unreliable foundations for expanding our knowledge: they should have been compiled from material without gaps, in addition to comparing the author's complete works with a broad sample of the literature of his contemporaries. But when could such a situation ever arise? There have even been attempts to deny Aeschylus, on the basis of characteristics as fortuitous as they are unreliable, the authorship of Prometheus Bound, a work which, throughout tradition, has never been attributed to any other author. The attribution of papyrus fragments to Aeschylus—those depicting the world after the acquisition of fire—should not be treated with any less caution.

This appears to have been the approach taken, with the utmost caution,59 by the editor of the publication of a fragment of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri 2245. Aeschylus does indeed appear here as the only one who should be taken into consideration, since he is the author of at least four versions of the Prometheus drama: in addition to 'Prometheus Bound' (Prometheus Desmotes), there was also a 'Prometheus Saved' (Prometheus Lyomenes), a 'Prometheus the Fire-Bearer' (Prometheus Pyrphoros), and a 'Prometheus the Fire-Bringer' (Prometheus Pyrkaeus). The last drama mentioned was surely a satire, dated 472 BC, and presented as the fourth play alongside the tragedies Phineus, The Persians and Glaucus of Potnia, simply titled Prometheus, primarily because it was the earliest in time and there was

need to distinguish it from the others the poet would still write about the various Prometheuses. Various vases depicting images of Prometheus – also with his name inscribed – surrounded by satyrs and holding the reed stalk in which he conceals the fire he has just stolen, must have been dated between 440 and 420 BC,60 when Aeschylus died in 456. In other words, the theme of his first Prometheus, thirty years later, continued to appeal to vase painters. Was the Pyrkaeus performed again in those days? Or were dramatic works also written about the appearance of fire and its effect on the earth after Aeschylus's death? Regarding the plot of the Desmotes, in addition to Aeschylus, the table of contents referring to this tragedy explains that it could only be found in Sophocles, but not in Euripides. Countless possibilities remain open, both for the Oyrhynchus fragment and for the Heidelberg Papyrus 185, in which one initially sought to recognise a fragment of the Lyomenos,61 and later of the Pyrphoros:62 but it is impossible to elucidate anything, until perhaps a new discovery enlightens us, and our receptiveness proves worthy of the content.

THAT WHICH CAN BE COMMUNICATED

Compared with previous generations, today we can have a much richer and more concrete view of the Greek world, with a mythical dimension that no one can entirely avoid, provided that one does not fragment the overall picture by focusing solely on specific thematic groups, and in particular on the category relating to religion. This perspective is not yet shared by those who focus on a specific category, nor will it be the final or definitive one. Welcker's approach, based on a similar experience of conceiving literature, art and mythology as a whole, offered a much richer and more concrete vision than that of his predecessors, and, even though we have long since moved beyond it, it succeeded in clearly distinguishing and articulating what was most important within a new context of the study of antiquity. Let us quote here a few words taken from the 'Appendix' he dedicated to his work on Aeschylus's trilogy, referring to the role of mythological tradition and the deepening of our understanding, both of ancient humanity and of humanism in general, which even today is worth considering and bringing

. May the somewhat ponderous style with which we are confronted here be dispelled by the breath of life of the late Goethean era.

‘To conceive and perceive the essence of these matters correctly is now as essential for anyone seeking to pass judgement on the early period of archaic civilisations, or on works from later periods relating to them, as it was in Winckelmann’s time to learn what is beautiful in art, in order to gain a true understanding of the new facts revealed by marble sculptures and historical records—which had long since become established as historical foundations—and thus be able to discuss them. Those who did not wish to learn this at the time, quite rightly did not learn it, and instead mocked the teachings of those who claimed to have found something new in the works they criticised, in which they had seen nothing, nor would they ever see anything. From an old Roman, who in those days had worked as a young assistant in a sculptor’s workshop, I learnt that when the young German (quel giovine tedesco) suddenly caused such a great stir, he and his peers were filled with indignation. This would have been their motto: l’antico non vale un fico (“the ancient is not worth a fig”). But the way the self-conscious old man laughed at himself hinted at the progress that had been made since those days. Between Bernini’s art and a vision of myths—one that excludes any ideal element and considers only material factors, the development of prosaic rational concepts, often elevated to the level of the caricature, to the point where the true nature of a cultural period ceases to be identifiable—the difference may not be as pronounced as was initially surmised. But surely the comparison contained therein is accurate, and approaching both—the later works of the fine arts as well as the myths of archaic times—requires the contribution of meaning, sensitivity and understanding. These qualities have emanated from the objects themselves, have been attained through them, and have been perfected by them: but the spark, as soon as it leaps, is already transmissible, and of the glimmers that emerge, the first and tiniest will, not without merit, alight upon the objects; and only when the great investigation, once begun, is pursued actively and meticulously—even if it first requires great effort—will they crystallise into many: to deny them then will be no easy task for anyone.”

6. THE WORLD IN THE GRIP OF FIRE

FROM THE KINDLE OF FIRE

The spirits of lost literary works, such as those of the tragedies Prometheus Pyrphoros and Prometheus Lyomenos, part of Aeschylus's trilogy, as well as that of his satirical drama Prometheus Pyrkaeus, can never reappear unless the texts are actually rediscovered. And a plausible reconstruction of the works themselves, their restructuring or the recomposition of the details that have not been handed down to us, is out of the question; for where is the proper measure of reliability to be found when dealing with something purely and simply unimaginable, with unrepeatable creations and artistic inspiration: such as the 'inspiration' of Pyrphoros, of Lyomenos, of Pyrkaeus?

We possess a single line from the satirical drama The Fire-Bringer, with the full title of the work (Fr. 206):

linᾶ dē, pissa ϰώmolinou maṕroi tōnoi

Linen cloth and pitch and long strands of raw linen.

Here, one can only refer to the making of torches that burn more slowly. Prometheus taught the satyrs to do this, as we see in the paintings on the vases, in which they dance with flaming torches around them.63 They embody the original men, and are depicted in a manner very similar to those seen on the fragment of the vase from the Cabirion of Thebes.64 It is highly likely that the indoctrination of the institution was a characteristic of the torchbearers at the great Athenian festivals – the great Panathenaea and those of Prometheus and Hephaestus. It may have involved the effective establishment

of this ceremony: the lampás, lampadedromia or lampadephoria. This presupposed that Prometheus had brought fire in a specific manner – 'in the hollow of the stem', as we know from Hesiod – and this is how it is depicted: the rod in which he carried the fire differed from the satyrs' torches. He was the pyrphoros, but not a lampadephoros, and consequently the lampadephoria was never called pyrphoria, as might have been possible from a purely linguistic point of view. Bringing fire to mankind constituted a unique act, which, as soon as it had taken place, was followed by the first race of torchbearers, not as a repetition of Prometheus's action, but as a sacred act which he had initiated. This possibility of imitating the celestial fire and its circuit, from the moment fire existed on earth, was a fact.

But both satyrs and early humans still had to be taught how to handle it. The lines that follow, taken from one of Aeschylus' Prometheus plays, though not explicitly from the Pyrkaeus, may belong to an instructive scene depicting the method of kindling fire (205).

Be careful lest the mouth of the torch strike

you; for the vapours are bitter, and the

fumes prove deadly

Take care lest it cause blisters on your face, for they are bitter,

and the vapour proves deadly.

But is this really about lighting a fire? Is it true that fire can cause blisters when lit (πέμφιξ) and deadly vapours (ἀτμοί)? Are these not rather instructions for operating a primitive iron-smelting furnace, one of those still in use today in Africa?65 We might imagine that this scene takes place in Prometheus's workshop – in a forge where iron is worked – where he is instructing an apprentice. Or perhaps the instructor is Epimetheus and the fragment is linked to the Heidelberg fragment.

However, it is even more likely that it belongs to the verse by Pyrcaeus, quoted without mention of title or author, but which identifies Prometheus as the speaker (207).

τράγος γένειον ἆρα πενθήσεις σύ γε

So, billy-goat, for your beards you shall soon weep!

We are also given a description of the scene (Plutarch, Mor. 86 E): a satyr, probably the leader of the satyr play, the eldest among those creatures taking part as dancers, was struggling to embrace and kiss Prometheus's conquest, who was still a complete stranger to him. He was warned by the Titans.

THE OXYRHYNCHUS FRAGMENT

The satyrs, and their propensity for kissing, lead us into a world where their kind joyfully celebrate Prometheus's gift. Is it the chorus leader himself who, in the few lines of the Oxyrhynchus fragment that are still legible—though quite comprehensible—bursts into song accompanied by a refrain from the dancers? It would be a chorus of satyrs who think only of the nymphs and summon them to gather round the fire, as if it were a sparkling, bubbling spring. There would take place what has always happened between satyrs and nymphs:

κλύουσ' ἐμοῦ δὲ ναΐδων τις παρ'

ἐστιοῦχον σέλας πολλὰ διώξεται,

νύμφας δέ τοι πέτοιθ' ἐγώ

στήσειν χόρους

Προμηθέως δῶρον ὡς σεβούσας

If the nymph hears me, I will pursue her in the

light of the fire!

The nymphs—I trust them; they

lead the circle

to celebrate Prometheus's gift.

The last three lines are repeated as a refrain. The praise of Prometheus completes the following lines, which have been preserved in an incomplete form: it is he who brings life (φερέσβιος) to mortals, the one who hastened to bring his gift (σπευσίδωρος). Humans, along with satyrs and nymphs, live on earth, and the Titan had come to their aid with his gift. The situation is that of the Pyrkaeus, in which the state of the world is depicted after the fire-bringer appeared with his offering to bring forth a fountain of joy in which fire is even for the gods.

THE HEIDELBERG FRAGMENT

In the chorus of the Heidelberg fragment, consisting of fifteen lines with no beginning or end, there are no satyrs, but Titans. The words can be read without much difficulty: 'The light of fire inflamed the mortals (πυρὸς ἦψε φαὸς βροτοῖς)', and further on it continues, 'ill-fated blood brothers (δύσποτμοι ξυναίμονες)', which can only be a reference to the Titans. This is how the chained one referred to them in Cicero's Prometheus Lyomenos (Tusculan. 2.23.):

Descendants of the Titans, kin of our blood

Titans, sprung from the same blood, closest to me!

This means that Aeschylus, apart from in *Lyomenos*—or perhaps an imitator—reintroduced the chorus of the Titans into the play. If it was Aeschylus himself who did so, then it is far more likely that he would not have done so in a play whose content continued the story of Prometheus's liberation. The Titans witnessed the liberation in the Lyomenos: and whatever their peculiar blood relative did later on could no longer be a miraculous work to which they had to pay attention. In his arts, regarded as an immediate consequence of the theft of fire, they would rather have admired him, and also later in what might have followed: because of his successive sufferings. They might well have appeared a second time in the Lyomenos as well.

The novelty that had drawn them there was the source of the clanging sound of work coming from the smithy in the distance: the word 'χαλκοτύπει' could be read there, which is related to 'χαλκοτύπος' ('smith') and 'χαλκοτυπεῖν' ('to forge'). This could in no way be linked to Prometheus's chaining to his rock! The situation and the atmosphere around them were very different, much more serene. Work was being done on an ἄγαλμα, a statue, probably an ἄγαλμα παρθένου, in the image of a maiden. And what is more, 'she is singing'! What is she singing? What follows is probably the happiest complement one could imagine:66

χαλκὸς κτυπεῖ μα]κρᾶι τε μέλπε[ται βοᾶι

The iron resounds in the distance, singing with a sonorous voice!

On the stage is, as was also the case with the second quotation, the one that had been mistakenly attributed to Pyrkaeus, the first forge of the primordial world founded by the fire-bearer.

Perhaps we would be going too far if we were to emphasise the distinction between ‘iron’ and ‘bronze’ in the language of the Attic playwrights. The terms used for the blacksmith and the work of the forge originated in the Bronze Age, and originally referred to the ancient craft, preserved by artists but not among ordinary craftsmen. It is likely that the Cabirian sanctuary at Samothrace possessed an old smelting furnace,67 which was used to produce the iron rings that initiates were required to wear – as we shall see later – in imitation of Prometheus. Here, the metal lacks the significance of the atmosphere, and to demonstrate this, a very vivid African example may be cited. In complete agreement with the traveller in Africa whom we have mentioned previously, the celebrated author[68] describes to us, from her own experience, the atmosphere of a similarly primitive workshop:

‘The song of the blacksmiths attracts and captivates the local people. The tinkling, lively, monotonous and erratic rhythm of the blacksmith’s work possesses a mythical influence. It is so virile that it subjugates and enchants a woman’s heart; it is open and devoid of false adornments, speaking the truth and nothing but the truth. It is boundless in its strength and as entertaining as it is vigorous; it is provocative and yields with ease, persevering and effortless. The natives, lovers of rhythm, would gather in Pooran Singh’s hut and felt very much at ease with him. According to an ancient Nordic law, a man is not responsible for what he has expressed in a blacksmith’s workshop. In Africa too, sitting by the forge, tongues were loosened, conversation flowed more freely, and the boldest dreams came to light beneath the enthralling sound of the hammering. And a precise parallel further complements the line of the passage:
‘In Pooran Singh’s forge, as if lending its voice to hearts, the hammer sang what each person longed to hear.’

The mention of Ga mater, Mother Earth, under whose protection Prometheus seems to have sought refuge, is confirmed by the passage. She was above all the Mother of the ancestors of the Athenians, of the natives of Attica:69 everything that took place in this tragedy could have occurred in Attica before Prometheus’s punishment, even if he had been to suffer for thirty thousand years, as the Pyrphoros announced, something which, however, did not come to pass. Did the change regarding the punishment take place in the work to which the fragment belongs, and was this work the Pyrphoros? Both are possible, and even demonstrable, but we do not have sufficient certainty to

affirm it. This is as far as we could go, to the very edge of what is known; now we must pause briefly to at least thoroughly resolve an apparent difficulty concerning the position of the Pyrphoros.

THE POSITION OF THE PYRPHOROS

The subject matter and the position of the two lost tragedies of the trilogy, and their relationship to the one that has been preserved, Prometheus Desmotes, are certainly recognisable from their titles alone: Pyrphoros, the 'fire-bearer', could only precede Desmotes, the 'chained one', whilst Lyomenos, the 'liberated one', must have followed. And so it must have been.

In the surviving version of the tragedy, Prometheus, chained to the rock, announces—in a powerful, though not entirely unambiguous, phrase—the duration of his punishment (93–95):

δέρχθηθ' οἵαις αἰκίαισιν

διακναιόμενος τὸν μυριετῆ

χρόρον ἀθλεύσω –

'Behold the vile torments with which they torment me for countless thousands of years!' The word μυριετής, translated here as
'countless thousands of years', can also mean 'ten thousand years'.
Prometheus, since his torment has only just begun, refers to a time yet to come and uses the future tense to explain himself. The way he expresses himself leaves no room for doubt; it is a predetermined time: the 'countless thousands of years…'. But there are several reasons for his vagueness: the audience already knows the duration of the punishment imposed on the Titan for the sacrilege he has committed; in this situation, he should rather tend towards exaggeration, and harbour the hope of managing to free himself before the appointed time has elapsed. This is precisely what occurred in the

thirteenth generation after Io, who would soon appear on the scene. And it is Prometheus who once again predicts the duration for him, and this time, incidentally, he does so precisely (774).

To make up for the inaccuracy of the first prophecy, an elderly commentator – whether Archaic or Byzantine – remarked: '[The poet] says in the *Pyrphoros* that he had remained chained for thirty thousand years (τρεῖς μυριάδας δεδέσθαι αὐτόν)'. This number of years also appears in Empedocles (Fr. 114.6): the divine spirits found guilty must wander, in different bodies, across the earth for three times ten thousand years. This seems to have always been the period of punishment for the Titans. However, the way the phrase is interpreted in the Scholium cannot have been present in the Pyrphoros. Even less so when the play followed the Lyomenos: by then the audience already knew that the Titan, in accordance with the prophecy uttered by Io, would be freed before the term expired by one of his descendants of the thirteenth generation. Only if the Pyrphoros were the first play of the trilogy, as has been suggested, could something similar – in all probability – have been said in the final scene, but not as a prophecy, rather as a confirmation of Prometheus's sentence to thirty thousand years of exile, during which he was to remain chained. The 'quote' is limited to τρεῖς μυριάδας, and even more likely to εἰς τρεῖς μυριάδας. The δεδέσδαι can only be attributed to Aeschylus in terms of content, as a verbal perfect used by the glossator. There can be little doubt that it was Prometheus who 'brought fire' in the Pyrphoros, and even before turning to the interpretation of the Desmotes, we must add a few words on the matter.

7. THE FIRE THIEF

THE IMPERFECTION OF THE THIEF

Following the joy that the gift of fire brought to all beings on earth – including the spirits of nature – a tragic change ensued. But the manner in which it occurred has not been handed down to us, and it is impossible to reconstruct. Nor do we know what it consisted of, and it can only be reconstructed from the general sense of what happened: Prometheus takes the side of mankind, and from then on we shall see him also entangled in their new weaknesses and difficulties. Everything we say about him must remain within the realm of the possible and probable, until we can once again base our interpretation on a coherent text, as was previously done with the texts of the Theogony and the Works and Days.

The theft of fire as a robbery – theft or pilfering – characterises the thief as someone whose existence is marred by imperfection. And the more essential the stolen item, the greater the effect of this deficiency. Hermes did not regard fire as something essential, nor did he steal it, but rather found it through his own ingenuity – as the Homeric Hymn assures us – through his own spirit, in a sense. For Hephaestus, on the other hand, fire was so essential that even his name was used to denote it. It is he who possesses fire, which is why the human way of life acquired dignity—something impossible without fire—and this is something that can be attributed to him, as the Homeric Hymn and also the Hymn to Hephaestus do. But not because of his imperfection, but because of his exuberance: he did not bestow fire upon men, who previously lived in mountain caves like animals (20, 4), but rather brought them his works and the sense of art to create them – Prometheus also attempted this, but was tragically prevented by his punishment. Neither he nor Hermes needed to resort to theft. Prometheus's darkness is identifiable with the imperfection of a being for whom fire might well have been essential to achieving a more perfect way of being. However, in order to improve that of mankind, Prometheus presented himself

as their double and perpetuated the essentially imperfect image of their way of being.

Aeschylus has Prometheus, the benefactor of humanity, embody the eternity of this condition – a way of being that in reality represents an existing, timeless and independent possibility of fulfilment – the fundamental characteristics of human existence. This occurs in the second and third tragedies of the trilogy, to which the representation of two fundamental characteristics was reserved, which we shall now consider. From both dramas, a final illustration of the essential characteristic also emerges, to which – if we judge by the title – the first tragedy had been dedicated.

Pyrphoros, the 'fire-bearer', refers impartially to the thief of fire without branding him a sinner: Prometheus was obliged – especially after opening his workshop in Attica – to carry the stolen fire a long way to that place, and this is the only thing emphasised here. Aeschylus regarded the act of seizing fire as theft, and in the 'Assembly' he already describes it in this way – as Hesiod had also done. If the title of the play, whether the poet's own invention or that of someone else – struck by its intensity – suggests that Prometheus's condemnation is not present in the first tragedy, this does not prevent the terrible punishment of thirty thousand years of torment from being inflicted nonetheless, and thus the foundation for the suffering—of which we shall be spectators from the outset of the second play—is already established: the inevitable imperfection of acting wrongly as an essential characteristic of man.

THE INEVITABLE WRONGDOING

Acting wrongly was inevitable because without fire humanity would have become extinct – a long-standing objective of Zeus, explicitly stated in the Desmotes (232) – and this inevitable course of action was wrong because the availability of fire fell within the realm of the world-ruler's power: he held dominion over everything that had 'grown' without being the work of man.

This situation of legality for Zeus, which became illegality for humans, was the determining factor in the events of the Desmotes. When Hesiod describes the details of this act, as inevitable as it was wrong – the theft of fire – he tells us that Zeus (according to the Theogony) ‘did not offer’ fire to men:

Then, ever mindful of this deceit,

he did not grant the ash trees the power of the tireless

fire. Or also (according to Works and Days):

That is why he devised miserable torments for men and

hid the fire.

Prometheus then ‘stole’ (ἔκλεψε) fire, deceiving Zeus with a cunning thief’s ruse: what he stole in secret, he carried ‘in the hollow of the stem of an umbelliferous plant –ἐν κοίλωι νάρθηκι–’, hidden in the stem of the ferula, as we are told in both the Theogony and the Works and Days. A Dionysian and covert carrier is what it appears to be, since the stem of this type of plant was used as a thyrsus in the procession of the Bacchantes. The deceptive appearance is attested by the images on the vases, in which the Titan can barely be distinguished from Dionysus.70 Now, one might ask whether Aeschylus particularly emphasised the Dionysian interpretation: in his work too, the bearer of fire, as an innocent bearer of a rod of ferula, deceived Zeus. ‘Burning without flame in the marrow of the stalk, I took the fire of the stolen origin,’ so spoke Prometheus in the Desmotes, and with the word ‘origin’ the song of the satyrs from the Oxyrhynchus fragment (109–19) is restored:

But I consider the fire to be

A veritable Promethean ruse. It also explains a custom still practised in modern times by certain Greeks on the islands, who in this way preserve and carry fire—a custom which, viewed from the opposite perspective, sheds light on the ruse: it was a sacred yet practical custom that men had been compelled to observe since time immemorial.71 Cicero gives us a glimpse of the long journey they had to undertake with the fire when, in Prometheus' speech, he quotes the chorus of the Titans, in reference to the verses of Lyomenos, describing the theft of fire as furtum Lemnium, 'the Lemnian theft'. Aeschylus seems to have set the scene of the event on the distant island of Lemnos, in the Thracian Sea. The indication of this location appears to set the playwright apart from Hesiod's account. Prometheus, according to Works and Days (51), steals fire from Zeus: Διὸς πάρα. The story of the theft is recounted in later sources – though we do not know whether they are documented in the texts of Aeschylus's lost tragedies –72 and in these Prometheus stealthily approaches Zeus's fire, likely the one burning in the palace of the Olympian gods. He took some sparks to keep them inside the reed stalk and waved it in the air so that the fire would not go out, whilst joyfully flying towards where the men were, and possibly the first place was Lemnos. Later, this version was followed by another,73 in which Prometheus reached the Sun and lit a torch from the solar disc. On the island of Lemnos there is indeed a sort of volcano on its northern side, with the crater on Mount Moschilos, within the domain of Hephaestus, who had his sanctuary and his city, Hephaestia, there. It was only from that place that Prometheus could have stolen fire, from Hephaestus's workshop; so it is reasonable to think, and so it has been told to us.

The 'theft of Lemnos', however, does not seem to fit with this version, at least for Aeschylus, who rejects the idea that the fire could have come only from Lemnos and not from Zeus. Rather, following the eruption of the gases, Moschilos too would have appeared fiery! Hephaestus worked in the depths of the earth and, as we know from the Iliad (18.402), in the depths of the sea. The poet's opposition can be seen at the beginning of the surviving tragedy. There Hephaestus appears, ready to chain Prometheus—in accordance with Zeus's command—to the rocks of the

crag. But he carries out the order with extreme reluctance. Cratos, Zeus's henchman, has to explain to him at length that it was his ἄνθος, his 'flower', a plant belonging to him, which Prometheus had taken and given to humans (8). This does not suggest that Hephaestus felt he had been the victim of a theft. Had the Titan, having broken down the doors of his palace and his workshop, committed the theft – as later artists claimed – he would have felt so! But this did not happen, because fire was in the possession of Zeus, as can be read in Hesiod, and from there it first reached Lemnos, the place to which Hephaestus himself was cast from Olympus, as is written in the Iliad (1.592–4). Aeschylus, too, seems to have considered this tradition in the Pyrphoros, the transmission of a furtum Lemnium, had the tragedy not in fact been set on the distant island of the Cabiri.74

Lemnos venerated in the Cabiri – we note this in a conceptual, though not conclusive, manner – its own original and divine inhabitants: its primordial men, also regarded as sons of Hephaestus – a genealogy easily linked to the Homeric mythological motif – who, as a god, was precisely cast down to Lemnos. There was, however, another Lemnian tradition that spoke of the oldest Cabiro whom the island itself had conceived, the first man.75 Through the name given to the Cabiroi of Lemnos, the Karkinoi, the 'crabs',76 one can imagine a teeming people of primordial beings and, at the same time, of blacksmiths with tongs in hand, imbued with their characteristic primordial masculine divinities; legend has it that they were driven to emigrate by the hostilities of the Lemnian women towards their men.77 Aeschylus, in his Argonautica trilogy, depicted in one tragedy the return of the primordial Lemnian creatures to their island: the Kabeiroi. A tragedy of Dionysian excess, in which no vessel could contain the overabundance of wine, leading to the drunkenness of the heroes surrounding Jason as they took to the stage. Something unusual in the history of Greek drama, almost unthinkable, all those drunken gods and heroes! The warning was already issued in antiquity:78 How much more unthinkable, even if it is ultimately natural, is it hidden from us behind a simple title such as that of Pyrphoros!

8. PROMETHEUS CHAINED

COSMOGONICAL TRAGEDY

*For us, *Prometheus Bound* is the quintessential representation of the tragedy of Prometheus; it is the poem of Prometheus, the only one entirely dedicated to him that has survived from antiquity. And yet we have been unable to discern the other reason why this tragedy can be considered unique: because it belongs to the poetics of cosmogony, in the Greek sense of cosmogony conceived as the foundation of the world, and, unlike the other tragedies we know, as a dramatic work it forms no part of heroic poetics or the mythology of the Greek heroes. The decisive founding act of Zeus, with the defeat of the Titans, in which he also had the aid of Prometheus (218), is taken for granted. The limitation of another founding act, the attenuation of a legal situation – a situation of δίκη as a common measure for gods and men (29–30) – with the implicit extinction of the human race (232) and the construction of the world through Prometheus for the liberation of men as components of the plot of the first tragedy of the trilogy. In the second, we are shown the conditions under the new rule of Zeus (35, 96, 144, 310) and that of the other Olympians (955), without establishing them definitively, but rather as a state open to subsequent cosmogonic developments that lend mobility and tension to this tragedy in the face of the possibility of a foundation surpassing that of Zeus and the other Olympians – just as Zeus's founding acts prevailed over the age of the Titans. The third tragedy is the only one that excludes that threatening possibility leading to the firm and definitively established and ordered world, the world in which we live.*

IMAGE OF THE REIGN OF ZEUS

The image of this order—which establishes Zeus's dominion as an all-powerful authority—is what moves us from the very outset of the tragedy. The staging technique used to depict Prometheus's chaining might, at best, provoke a curiosity that would turn our emotion into something perverse. 'Force' itself, personified as Krátos—according to its objective Greek name—is what drags Prometheus onto the stage, accompanied by the silent and crude
'violence', by Bia, so called in Greek, and by Hephaestus. The speaker is Kratos. He refers to the essence of the new order, the absolute and unlimited dominion of the new laws (150), expressed to their ultimate consequences, and which he sums up in a single sentence (50): 'No one is free, except Zeus'. He is the only one who stands above the laws, and his is the nomos, the law. Cratos's words are for a being who emerges from the omnipotent insensitivity of an abstract order. Elemental beings such as Hephaestus prove feeble in the face of such absolutism of the abstract, in the face of the inflexibility of a system determined by laws. Here, two aspects of the world that surrounds them clash: Cratos represents the harshness and inflexibility that envelops us in an unlimited way, whilst a multitude of elemental beings, inhabitants of the tragedy's stage, show us their kinship and a friendly relationship.

Hephaestus identifies with both, with the kinship (τὸ συγγενές) and the cordial relationship (ὁμιλία) with Prometheus. He is startled by this once again (14–15 and 36–39),79

But I lack the courage to chain a god—my own kin—by

force to this storm-tossed precipice. CRATOS.

Well then! Why do you linger and take pity in vain? Why do you not hate the god who is most detestable to the gods of all, he who granted mortals your privilege?

HEPHAESTUS.

The bonds of kinship and friendship are terribly strong.

And after having driven a wedge through his chest (66-60):

HEPHAESTUS.

Alas, alas, Prometheus, I weep for your sorrows!

CRATOS.

You waver and groan for the enemies of Zeus. May you never one day have to feel pity for yourself.

HEPHAESTUS.

You have a dreadful sight before your eyes!

A situation we had already reached at the beginning of the tragedy, the θέαμα δυσθέατον, a spectacle ‘that the eye can scarcely bear’, which will loom before us until the very last moment, when, at the end of the play, Prometheus is crushed and cast into the depths of Tartarus. This is not merely a dramatic effect to shock the audience! But a significant image of the new order introduced by Zeus: the dominion of the new laws over the ancient elements.

PROMETHEUS AND THE ELEMENTS

Much like the torment of Prometheus, suspended high above, with chains holding him fast to the rock, so too does the punished Hera suffer, hanging from the sky, her feet bound by two anvils—a position befitting a lunar being—as described to us in the Iliad (15, 18–21). Another spectacle that is also difficult to behold. But Prometheus wishes to be beheld, and calls upon the elements, invoking them from a spirit of immediate solidarity, common to them all, and unique in Greek literature. The

immediate embodiment of kinship and friendly relationship, represented precisely by extreme human immediacy, which is known to us only through Hölderlin's relationship with the elements. At no other moment is Greek poetry perceived in such a Hölderlinian manner as in the following lines (83–93):

PROMETHEUS.

O divine ether, swift-winged winds, sources of the rivers, innumerable smile of the sea waves, mother earth of all things and circle of the all-seeing sun, I call upon you! Behold the sufferings I endure at the hands of the gods, I who am a god!

But the passage also conveys the distinct Greek understanding of what Zeus's order represented, as set out here. Prometheus calls upon all the sacred elements and the Sun—the most significant witness among the gods—to bear witness. This is a way of presenting oneself that contributes to the vividness of the events, but which in no way stems from personal arrogance or pride, as is the case in Goethe's Prometheus. Thus cries the Greek when he feels unjustly persecuted: μαρτύρομαι –'I call upon you, who, as witnesses, are seeing this!'–. It is the record of the first legitimate and valid complaint, addressed to a potential court, for having suffered an injustice. And this is what matters to us now. Prometheus is already suffering unspeakable torments in this tragedy. He is lamented by Hephaestus himself as he pierces his chest by the command of a higher power, even if these pains are not yet as unbearable as those the eagle will inflict when, in the third act, it begins to tear out his liver. This scene has not yet been mentioned. What Prometheus emphasises most about his torment is the infamy he endures (93–95): 'Behold with what outrages (αἰκίαισιν), torn asunder, I must struggle for an infinite time'. Or the continuation (96–97, which, in my view, requires no further emphasis): 'Such is the ignominious bondage that the new leader of the wretched has devised against me (δεσμόν αιώνιον)'. Defining it with the least emotional, though no less moving, term: injustice. Which sounds tremendously violent coming from Prometheus's mouth, when, in the final scene,

struck down by Zeus's thunderbolt, he vanishes into Tartarus, uttering the penultimate words of the tragedy:

O venerable mother, O ether that

spins the light common to all, do

you see what injustices I am

suffering?

O venerable mother, O ether that causes the light common to all to revolve, do you see what injustices I am suffering?

'BEYOND JUSTICE'

Aeschylus, unlike Hesiod, does not base Prometheus's punishment on a previous sacrilege, nor does he suggest that this was the reason why Zeus deprived mankind of fire; rather, this deprivation corresponded to 'justice', δίκη, to the order that Zeus had imposed upon the gods and men. We find this justification in the words of Hephaestus, at the beginning of the tragedy (29–30):

You, a god, undaunted by the wrath of the gods, bestowed

honours upon mortals beyond what justice demanded.

In the 'beyond justice', πέρα δίκης, the fairness of punishment seems to find its justification. Aeschylus, however, does not present the reasoning in such a conclusive manner. Let us consider the pertinent words of the Titan, who, without seeking to alter the fact or the relationship with the order established by Zeus, addresses the daughters of Oceanus, the chorus of the tragedy (119–23):

Behold me in chains, wretched god, the enemy of Zeus, he who has become odious to all the gods who have access to the palace of Zeus, because of my excessive love for mortals.

The phrase ‘beyond justice’, πέρα δίκης, in Prometheus’s mouth is equivalent to
‘too much love’, showing an exaggerated friendship towards men, which is likewise an equivalent of ‘excess’:

διὰ τὴν λίαν φιλότητα βροτῶν

And suddenly it becomes clear that the order to which this disposition belongs is to blame for Prometheus’s sufferings, for he has done nothing other than what we all feel compelled to do. Adopting our position—that of men—his actions and his suffering were nothing more than the consequences of taking this stance: something we were already able to surmise whilst reflecting on a possible Pyrphoros. Now we see it more clearly: since his actions and his suffering are a consequence of his taking a stand, his suffering is an injustice.

THE WORLD OF ZEUS AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

Precisely for us humans, the existence of an order of Zeus is an indicator of this stance. An order that refers to the real world, in which we are compelled to live. This world is present in Prometheus Bound, though not in a conclusive manner, through Promethean suffering and knowledge – as we shall soon see – and is also called into question as never before in the entire history of the Greek spirit. The mythologist and tragic poet proves more intrepid than the philosophers. He recognises that limitation as an unshakeable fact of the existing world, against which human existence inevitably collides. That is to say, he attacks the possibility that human existence itself is the source of its own suffering: of the suffering caused by injustice. Man accepts his own animal sufferings, the

physical, which in their existential significance are present in the final tragedy, the *Lyomenos*. Through his particular mode of existence, in which he likewise endures animal suffering, man is deprived of a faculty: that of being capable of suffering without, in that suffering, experiencing a sense of injustice. A faculty which, unlike men, animals retain, whose being, in both joy and torment, is integrated into the order of Zeus. Prometheus loved humans. It could not be otherwise: he was part of them. He brought them fire, a possession of which animals would be deprived, and thus animal existence lacks fire. In this way he elevated human existence to human existence. To an existence which, like that of animals, would always be vulnerable, suffering and mortal, but without enduring subjugation. A liberated existence which, nevertheless, included bondage and mortification. For as soon as man is man, as soon as he is regarded as a special being – which occurs in the myth of Prometheus, who through his way of being, behaving and suffering defines human existence – the deprivation of fire is a hardship that must be remedied: from that lack of subjugation to the inability to submit. But the sufferings that result from insubordination exceed those endured by animals: they are special sufferings and, in a way, a punishment. They are incomprehensible and nameless until the order of that man, insubordinate unlike the animal, is linked to some higher order: but not one that man recognises as subsisting in itself, even without the world, but until an ideal order of justice manifests itself in his spirit.

THE SUFFERINGS OF PROMETHEUS

For Prometheus, too, his suffering is at first inexpressible, an inevitable and incomprehensible event (106–8):

Yet neither to remain silent nor to speak of these misfortunes is possible for me. For having granted a privilege to mortals, I find myself…

A fault committed with the best of intentions has a wholly disproportionate repercussion, that of a fate which can only be one of existential suffering. The impossibility of finding a solution to such suffering is expressed in the words the Titan addresses to the chorus (197–8):

It is painful for me even to speak of it, but it is also painful to remain silent.

Thus Prometheus proclaims his suffering to the elements. When Io appears and asks him (620):

For what kind of offences are you serving your punishment?

A question that goes unanswered. For even the besieged maiden, who appears in the guise of a white cow – as a symbol of the utter helplessness of the feminine principle within the world order of Zeus – it would be too much to expect her to become aware of the plight of suffering humans and that of her companions. A helplessness in the face of injustice, which, as we have already seen, is also reflected in the final words of the tragedy. Ever since Hephaestus, the subjugated elemental god, declared that the existing order was an order of justice, the dike, thereby evoking the 'idea' of the dike: a higher, ideal order of justice that subsists of its own accord, one could only hope that it would be applied consistently and in accordance with the truth. As soon as the word 'justice' is uttered within of our order of the world, of immediate arises the word 'injustice' to designate the incomprehensible and nameless suffering. This is precisely the special suffering that is given to us as an integral part of human existence itself: not only so that we must suffer under the application of that order which, to our mortal eyes, is admirably conceived, but so that, with every inevitable suffering, we also suffer because of injustice. Thus is man punished for being man.

Aeschylus separates him from the knowledge of injustice, and powerfully emphasises Prometheus's suffering due to his knowledge of fate. That suffering, despite his being a god, he shares with humanity. And since he is a god, a close aide and co-founder to the king of the gods, he regards his suffering as a disgrace. Thus he is presented, as the image of injustice – and as the image of wounded divine pride. The young Goethe, with his humanism and his reserve, places himself in the very position of the gods, as if humans were entitled to divine rank. Prometheus, as a god for the Greek Aeschylus, adopts the human point of view. From his very being he suffers the offence; he suffers in his being as a man, whom he represents as a bearer and eternal figure, without thereby representing a counter-figure to the god. As a god possessing knowledge of fate, and as the son of a goddess versed in fate, he far exceeds the knowledge of Zeus. But this knowledge is not that
'twisting' knowledge we encountered in Hesiod. Cratos mocks him, and, indeed, with good reason (85–87):

The gods mistakenly call you Prometheus, for you yourself lack the foresight to see how you will escape this ruse.

Like humans, Prometheus is unable to free himself from the bonds of Zeus's world. His knowledge of fate proves powerless in the face of those fundamental aspects of human existence—such as bondage, pain and the suffering of injustice—which he himself endures in an archetypal manner. It offers him no help against what is purely and simply present – and this is what that suffering represents – but it strengthens him to face the future (102–5):

I know full well in advance all that awaits me, and no evil will befall me unexpectedly. I must bear the fixed fate as easily as possible, knowing that the force of necessity is invincible. Yet neither to remain silent nor to speak of these misfortunes is possible for me.

In this way, that which is unutterable is exalted, but not from that knowledge towards the silenced present: the knowledge of the possible overcoming of that order, in which Prometheus even shows himself superior to that king of the gods who does not possess it.

9. PROMETHEUS, HE WHO KNOWS

THE TWO THREADS OF THE TRAGEDY

This tragedy has been constructed around two central themes: that of suffering, through which Prometheus is punished for his human stance, and that of secret knowledge. The nature of suffering, a dominant feature throughout the work – the second in the trilogy – is perfectly comprehensible to us, as it is a moral suffering that is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Whereas the nature of Promethean knowledge, the second key component of the tragedy, requires greater precision in the sense that Aeschylus ascribes to it. Both he and Hesiod regard cunning as a characteristic and original trait of Prometheus, which enabled him to help Zeus defeat Cronus and the Titans (219–221). It is quite likely that this refers to an event already recounted in the Titanomachy: perhaps the herald of the Titans switched sides and aligned himself with the future king of the gods, but he did so only because he knew in advance that the victorious order would not be established by the impetuous force of the Titans, but by Zeus aided by Promethean cunning (213):

But to defeat the mighty through deceit.

Zeus possesses neither of these: neither the Promethean ‘cunning’ we already know, nor that knowledge of Prometheus which remains to be defined—the foresight he had inherited from his mother.

ZEUS, THE FATHER

Zeus's rise to power, as the omnipotent father and sole lawgiver, is not only illuminated by the cosmogonic event, dramatically portrayed by Aeschylus, but is explicitly recalled. When Hephaestus invokes his kinship and friendly relationship with Prometheus, Cratos replies (40):

I agree. But to disobey your father's orders, how is that possible? Do you not fear that more?

Although Hephaestus was known in Greek mythology as the son of his mother, referred to as such in the famous scene of the Iliad (1.571–600), and Hesiod even states in the Theogony (927) that he was the son of Hera alone and not also of Zeus! Emphasising his connection to his father, and through his father, is a clear indication of the prevailing paternal authority in Prometheus Bound. Submission to this authority, rather than to a genuine father-son relationship, is also evident in the mocking tone of Hermes' words when he cynically and brazenly agrees to share power (968–69):

Right. It is better, I think, to be a slave to this rock than to be a faithful messenger of Father Zeus.

The presence of Io, herself reduced to the feminine figure of defencelessness, makes the one-sidedness of the masculine in the prevailing paternal authority of Zeus's world shine even more brightly.

OCEANUS AND HIS DAUGHTERS

The relationship of kinship and friendship, the gentler aspect of the environment that Hephaestus also senses, though he does not delve into it, reaches almost entirely a Prometheus constrained to an existence—the human existence—that suffers unjustly. Winged, primordial female beings approach him: the

figures of Oceanus' daughters. At first he seems startled by this (114–19):

Ah, ah! Oh, oh! What murmur, what invisible scent has flown to me? Does it come from a god or a mortal or a mixture of both? Has it come to this cliff at the edge of the world to witness my sorrows, or what is it that it desires? Behold me chained, wretched god, the enemy of Zeus.

And then he becomes even more frightened, for it could also be the eagle (124–27):

Alas, alas! What fluttering of birds am I hearing? The air whistles with a gentle beating of wings. Everything that draws near fills me with dread.

To which the chorus of Oceanus' daughters responds reassuringly (128-35):

Fear not, for this flock is a friend; with swift, determined flapping of wings they have drawn near to this crag, having with great difficulty persuaded their father's heart. The swift winds have brought them to me. For the echo of the hammered steel penetrated to the very depths of my caves and dispelled my timid modesty, and, without putting on my shoes, I leapt into my winged chariot.

The father who wished to keep his daughters, according to Homer, was the oldest of the gods: Oceanus, that primordial element of the human form, whose virginal female manifestations are the Oceanids. Soon he too appears, mounted on a miraculous winged beast, just as his daughters appeared in a miraculous winged chariot, and he too feels moved by kinship and bonds of compassion. His words prove this (288–90):

I suffer with you, know this well, because of your misfortunes. For kinship, I believe, compels me to do so.

But what a difference in convictions between Oceanus and Prometheus, and also between the father and the daughters!

The epiphany of a primordial element, itself subject to the new world order, was necessary to highlight the conciliatory stance of the fundamental natural sustainers – one of whom is Oceanus in the Greek cosmovision – as a contrast to the human obstinacy displayed by Prometheus. The titanic and human aspects of his character stand out enormously against this backdrop. Nevertheless, in contrast to the fraternal and serene compassion shown by the Oceanids towards the weakest, which becomes integrated and disappears in their voluntary relationship with Prometheus, the docility towards the new sovereign displayed by the figure of that primordial force, by Oceanus, is presented with the caution of a cowardly man prone to the opportunity of compromise. Such equivocal ambiguity was not only incorporated into the new world order because humans were suffering – and through pain were to suffer for injustice – but also did so consciously, for Prometheus, trusting in his knowledge, spurned an Oceanus who offered him peace with the king of the gods.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF PROMETHEUS

It is the knowledge of a secret. Prometheus speaks of it briefly, and only to those companions who suffer with him: the Oceanids and Io, who suffers most of all. The chorus flies in, and coincidentally already alludes to the possibility to which this secret might refer (159–66):

Which of the gods could have a heart so hard as to take pleasure in this?
Who does not pity me for your sufferings, save Zeus? He, with unceasing resentment and an unyielding mind, has subjugated the offspring of Uranus and will not cease until he has satisfied his heart or until someone, with a cunning stroke, seizes the hard-won command.

And once this possibility is established – ‘may power be snatched from him at last’, O Zeus! – Prometheus gives voice to the other fundamental tone of the tragedy, that of knowledge leading to liberation (167–69):

Though I may be tortured in mighty bonds, the king of the blessed will still have need of me.

Responding to the chorus’s fearful doubts (186–92):

I know it is hard and that he holds justice in his hands, [yet] nevertheless, I believe that one day his spirit will soften, when he feels so broken. And when his fierce anger has subsided, one day he will form an alliance and friendship with me, of his own accord and mine.

But Prometheus does not thereby reveal the secret. He holds back, confident in his ability to manipulate the knowledge it affords him, and thus further demonstrates his likeness to man. The viewer of the trilogy, at the end of the third tragedy, *Lyomenos*, will see for themselves how different the bond of friendship that Prometheus then longs to forge with Zeus may turn out to be.
Does he not himself explain to the daughters of Oceanus how he has ‘healed’ the poor mortals in the face of the inevitable? (250):

I instilled blind hopes in them.

Only later do the daughters of Oceanus discover that Prometheus, in addition to this gift which is appropriate for all humans, has also brought them fire, something that belonged solely to the gods. Hence the chorus’s horror (253–73):

CHOREO

And now do these fleeting beings possess the blazing fire?

PROMETHEUS

Thanks to which they shall learn many arts.

CHOREO

For such accusations, Zeus will...

PROMETHEUS

Torments me, without in any way easing my sufferings.

CHORUS

And is there not a set end to your trial? PROMETHEUS

There is none at all, save when it pleases him. CHORUS

LEADER

And how will that please him? What hope is there? Do you not see that he has sinned? That you have sinned is not pleasant for me to tell you, and for you it is painful. But let us leave this, and seek a release from your trial.

PROMETHEUS

It is easy for one who stands free from sorrow to offer advice and warnings to one for whom things go ill. But I knew all this. Yes, knowingly, knowingly I sinned; I shall not deny it, and by helping mortals I brought suffering upon myself. However, I did not imagine that I would be consumed by such a punishment upon lofty rocks in this deserted region, without neighbours. And do not lament my present pains, but, descending to earth, hear of my coming fate, so that all may know it to the end.

This confession by the Titans—that they had erred deliberately and created suffering for the very good of mankind—that is, consciously—confirms the seemingly audacious interpretation of Promethean fate as a choice inherent to human existence. He knew that punishment was an implicit part of the human condition, but he was unaware of the horrific punishment that Zeus had prepared for him. And that, once again, was part of the image of human destiny: the unexpected is not the ‘what’, but the
‘how’!

MOTHER THEMIS

The appearance of Father Oceanus, the pacific one, who wishes to preserve the world’s tranquillity in the face of new upheavals, prevents Prometheus from revealing any more of his secret. Yet he has at least already named the source from which he himself draws his knowledge—this mysterious and unique knowledge with which he weaves, in a typically human way, a dazzling hope: the mother.

The allusion to Ga mater, to ‘Mother Earth’, in the Oxyrhyunchus fragment also recalls the mother of the Titans. Prometheus likewise calls her by the other name of Chthon (205): the mother of those born first, of the great Titans, and names Themis as his own mother
(202). It is difficult to determine whether this verse (210)

καὶ Γαῖα, πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφὴ μία

Earth, of one essence, whose names are many,

was added by Aeschylus himself, almost as a parenthetical aside intended to emphasise the unity of the great maternal goddess in her many aspects, or by someone else. However much this mythological motif was intended to portray merely the figure of the theologian of a patriarchal religion. But if for his mythological motif he chose Themis as the mother of Prometheus—who was neither ‘devious’ nor ‘deceptive’, but a ‘righteous

advisor' (18), then he had to emphasise her identity with the mother of the Titans through another tradition, traces of which were perhaps preserved in the Oxyrhynchus papyrus. In the tradition followed by both Aeschylus and Hesiod, Themis is a daughter of Mother Earth, of Gaia, and a Titaness (874). Her name expresses the laws of nature and those of any peaceful cycle, as well as those of systems of communal laws: this cycle is called Themis. Before Apollo – Loxias, the 'oblique one' – she was the great goddess of the oracle at Delphi, as was Gaia.

The Horae, who are said to be her daughters, illuminate the essence of Themis. For this triad of goddesses reveals itself in two aspects, corresponding to two parts of the mother. In Athens they were called Thallo, Auxo, Karpo, for sprouting, growing, ripening, and it was difficult to distinguish them from the Charites.80 In Hesiod (Theogony 55) they bear the names 'law', 'justice', 'peace', eunomia, diké, eirene. Horai signifies periods of time, rhythmic unfolding of the world in its temporality. If they were to become symbolic figures of an ideal world order – legitimate, just, peaceful – they would demonstrate that they are grounded in an earthly and maternal Themis, protector and originator of growth, bearer of fruit.

The goddess of the oracle possesses knowledge of time and growth, and the secret that Prometheus holds from her – as we shall soon see – concerns a knowledge of the will to grow and mature, to which even Zeus, as a father, must submit: within such growth and temporality, the forthcoming wedding will take place and he will become a father. According to the prevailing mythological tradition, as recounted by Hesiod and Pindar,81 Zeus celebrates with Themis herself the wedding that founded the world, establishing harmony and stability. However, he owed his ability to celebrate that wedding to Prometheus, who had drawn his mother to Zeus's side in the struggle against the Titans. Was there also evidence of this in the Titanomachy? This is how Prometheus puts it in Aeschylus (216–18):

Under these circumstances, it seemed best to me then, joining my mother, to willingly take the side of Zeus, who also desired it.

That was not a marriage – or at least not yet! – But was it perhaps precisely what led to a marriage between the great goddess and the victorious king of the gods in the Titanomachy? Did Aeschylus adhere more closely to the ancient mythological epic than could ever have been surmised, and for that reason remain silent throughout the trilogy regarding the cosmogonic wedding between Themis and Zeus? His mythological framework no longer forms a whole for us. In this tragedy, Themis certainly appears even more closely bound to Prometheus than to Zeus. How else could Prometheus have based his great hope on Zeus being compelled to learn of the great secret precisely through him: saved, in a sense, by his mother when she entrusted him with her knowledge in advance? That introduced a dramatic tension, from the very moment the chorus heard: 'Mine even then, mine is the need we had for the lord of the gods!'.

PROMETHEUS AND IOA

Oceanus – who, in the rhythm of the tragedy, represents the ebb tide – must pay no heed to anything beyond what has already reached his ears. Nor must his daughters, who, when alone with Prometheus, receive only very general information (515–18):

CHOREO

Who, then, is the helmsman of necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The three-faced Fates and the Furies of good memory.

CHOREO

Is Zeus, then, weaker than they? PROMETHEUS

Yes, he cannot escape fate.

CHORUS LEADER

What fate, then, is decreed for Zeus but to exercise power forever?

PROMETHEUS

You cannot yet know this; do not press the matter. CHORUS

LEADER

Truly, it is a lofty secret that you conceal. PROMETHEUS

Speak of something else. It is by no means fitting to reveal it; rather, it must be kept hidden at all costs, for if I manage to keep it safe, I shall escape these infamous chains and misfortunes.

Io appears when the chorus's song ends, in the form of a cow, wretched and hounded, condemned by Zeus to endure that inhuman courtship, and with her the ebb tide ends and the flood tide rises. A fantastical archaic world and a new suffering burst into the drama, a suffering that cries out for comfort (752-74):

PROMETHEUS

How poorly you would endure my trials! For it is not decreed by fate that I should die, since that would be the release from my sorrows. But the fact is that I now have no end in sight to my labours, until Zeus is cast out of his absolute power.

ÍO

Is it possible that Zeus might one day be driven from power?

PROMETHEUS

I think you would like this turn of events.

I

And why not, when I suffer so terribly because of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

You may rejoice at the thought that this is so. íO

By whom will his despotic sceptre be snatched away?

PROMETHEUS

By himself, through his own foolish decisions.

íO

How so? Tell me, if there is no harm in it.

PROMETHEUS

A wedding such as this will one day cause

him great distress. íO

Divine or mortal? If it may be said, tell me.

PROMETHEUS

What does it matter to whom? For it is not permitted to say.

I

Is he driven from his throne because of his wife?

PROMETHEUS

A son will be stronger than his father. íO

And has he no way of escaping this fate? PROMETHEUS

No, certainly not, unless I intervene, if he is freed from these chains. íO

Who is going to set you free if Zeus does not wish it?

PROMETHEUS

It must be one of your descendants. íO

What did you say? A son of mine is going to free you from

your troubles? PROMETHEUS

Yes, the third in the line after ten more generations.

What prophecies the son of Themis surprises us with! Something unique in Greek pagan literature: characteristic of the expectation of a saviour. The second prophecy – that of Io's grandson in the thirteenth generation, who will loosen the bonds of the Titans – points precisely and clearly to the figure of Heracles. A son of Zeus will appear after twelve generations, established according to a genealogical tradition, and will free Prometheus. He will only be able to do so because another son of Zeus, one greater than his father and who is to be born at precisely that time, will be able to overthrow and replace the ruler of the world. We may still expect a wedding of Zeus, as the conclusion to the founding works, through which that which has been founded will be dissolved. An unprecedented possibility shines forth: the possible liberation from the unbearable surrounding world, the overcoming of Zeus's order through that force

superior, in which the rising force almost grows within itself. In his thoughts, Prometheus has not yet fully aligned himself with this potential force majeure. Whose victory would not mean the solution he hopes for from Zeus—and with Zeus—in this world of ours that has been given to us, but rather another unforeseeable dissolution of the prevailing world order. Perhaps he could help the king of the gods once more, if the latter were to beg him. And Heracles, the predestined liberator, will undoubtedly come; though, in Io's view, he will not do so should Zeus command otherwise. But Prometheus also considers the other possibility: that of not helping Zeus!

THE WORDS OF PROMETHEUS' ORACLE

Thus, following Io's disappearance, the prophecy becomes more than a mere promise of salvation. It represents a unique imaginative leap, reaching beyond the world, beyond the cosmos, and revealing the essential limitation of all that exists within the full scope of Zeus's power. The existing cosmos signifies the encompassable and the encompassed, the dominable and the chained, Zeus and Prometheus, the gods and men. Prometheus will not die, but will suffer – for thirty thousand years, an entire age. The human race, saved from annihilation (235), will also endure. However, something different from our world might still come into being. Prometheus rises in a certain sense above this world, not out of pride and spite, but through a vision conceived from a profound maternal source (908–26):

PROMETHEUS: Truly, Zeus, though arrogant of spirit, will one day be humbled by the marriage he is about to enter into, which will lead to his downfall and the loss of his absolute power and his throne. Then the curse of his father, Cronus—which he uttered when he was overthrown from his former throne—will be fully fulfilled. No god but I could clearly show him a way to avoid such misfortunes. I know this, and I know how. In the face of this, let him sit there fearlessly, confident in his thunderous roar from on high, brandishing in his hands the fire-breathing spear. For none of this will be enough to save him from falling ignominiously, a fall beyond endurance. Such a rival he is now preparing against himself, an invincible prodigy, who will encounter a flame mightier than lightning and a mighty

roar that surpasses thunder and a sea-calamity that shakes the earth, which will shatter Poseidon's trident-spear. When he crashes into this misfortune, he shall learn how different it is to command and to be a slave.

After this accumulation of the oracle's words, there remains a lull amidst the waves of tragedy: the arrival of Hermes with a threatening message from Zeus (947–48):

The Father commands you to speak of that wedding of which you boast, for which he loses his power.

With one final climax: Zeus's thunderbolt strikes that unyielding man who possesses knowledge, from whose mouth the invocation to the eternal witnesses rings out as a conclusion. Hermes, too, certainly came to him bearing knowledge. Not with one belonging to the son of Themis, but with the determination of the punishments that must continue – something Prometheus also believes he knows in advance and all too well – until the impossible, the barely conceivable, occurs.

10. THE PROPHECY OF PROMETHEUS

THE FOUNDATION OF PROPHECIES

The prophecies concerning the son of Themis, which seemed to reveal themselves as expectations of salvation, compel us to pause and consider them. Although we shall soon recognise that Prometheus does not base his hopes on a salvation—which would mean the dissolution of Zeus's reign and his world order—that is to say, he does not ground them in a salvation in the Buddhist and Gnostic-Christian sense of the word, but solely in a solution that remains under the sovereignty and order of Zeus. Nevertheless, the idea of salvation, in its absolute form and unconditioned by historical Christianity, in a certain sense disrupts the firmly grounded wholeness of the Greek cosmos. If Prometheus merely awaits his solution and not a salvation in the later Gnostic sense or even in a concept even closer to the Christian one, then the idea of the fall of the just and unjust god of the world also arises in Aeschylus. Does this thought – we ask ourselves as we pause – have any basis in Greek mythology? A basis, apart from that of the very founding story of Zeus's world, which explains how the son himself brings down his father Cronus? The curious thing is that such a mythological basis does indeed exist, but it has not aroused sufficient interest to prompt further reflection on the matter. Pindar refers to it in a sober manner, in a tone devoid of any eschatological overtones, in his eighth Isthmian ode (27–35).

Zeus and Poseidon were vying for the hand of the glorious Thetis, a daughter of Nereus, the ancient god of the sea. Both longed to wed the beautiful goddess. Eros had fluttered about them. However, the immortal designs of the gods prevented the wedding from taking place. They had previously learnt of a prophecy revealed by the wise counsellor Themis: fate had decreed that the sea goddess would give birth to a son who would be more powerful than his own father. He would wield a weapon more powerful than the thunderbolt and more powerful than the trident – so it is said in Pindar's account, reproduced almost verbatim – provided he was sired by Zeus or

Poseidon. And the expectations of Aeschylus' Prometheus certainly accord with this. The source of his knowledge is the goddess herself, whilst the prophecy appearing in Pindar is delivered by the mother Themis. The oracle announces the fearsome power of what is to come, and they use the same standard to measure it (921–24):

He shall find a flame mightier than lightning and a mighty roar surpassing thunder and a sea-calamity that shakes the earth, which shall shatter Poseidon's trident-spear.

Both poems, the Isthmian Ode and the Prometheus trilogy, date from roughly the same period, at the dawn of what we know as the Classical Age. It is possible that Aeschylus was familiar with Pindar's ode, in which the mention of the trident alongside the thunderbolt is particularly well-grounded within the narrative. However, this cannot be known with certainty, because the meaning of the beautiful wedding story points to a solid and profound foundation, something that a contemporary of Aeschylus – or even of Pindar – could not have invented for the construction of a cosmogonic drama. Nor should it be regarded as a wholly free creation within the mythological tradition, which is in any case observed by both poets in the eyes of all classical Greece. All the more must account be taken of that archaic epic poetry, the bearer of a mythology older than Homer's, to which, in addition to the Titanomachy, the Cypria also belonged—the work of a Cypriot poet, containing tales that preceded the plot of the Iliad. When Themis intervenes[82] in this epic poem as an advisor to Zeus, in the Cypria and prior to Thetis's marriage to the mortal Peleus, this is something that could also have been recounted towards the end of that ancient history, perhaps in the Titanomachy, in which we are told that the mother of Prometheus and the king of the gods had established a pact.

The wedding of Thetis constitutes a crucial moment in the context of that history of the mythological world, in which the 'cyclical' poetics of the Greeks – which inaugurates and shapes the great epic circle – links, through the Cypria, the founding feats and victories of Zeus's world with the struggles and sufferings of the heroes. These battles and sufferings only began

with the Campaign of the Seven against Thebes – the plot of the Thebaid. They reach their exemplary culmination for the archaic and classical life of the Greeks in Troy, their most moving, most meaningful human climax – insofar as the birth of meaning can also occur without consolation – and most thrilling in the fate of Achilles. At the pole of the gods, the victorious Zeus reigns unshakeable, whilst at the pole of humans, in a very different way, without being a powerful figure, the immortal and mortal son of Thetis, the fruit of that marriage, reigns: Achilles.

THE SON OF THETIS

When Hölderlin acknowledges that his admiration for Homer lies above all in his Achilles, he does not stray far from the Greek conception of this heroic figure. 'It is unique,' he once wrote, 'the love and power of the spirit that has been used to understand, sustain and elevate this character. Take the elderly lords Agamemnon, Ulysses and Nestor, with their wisdom and their follies; take the boisterous Diomedes, a blindly combative Ajax, and compare them with the brilliant, almighty, melancholic and affectionate son of the god, with Achilles, with this enfant gâté of nature, and given the way the poet places the young man, filled with the strength of a lion and endowed with spirit and gallantry amidst precocity and roughness, and in the character of Achilles you will discover a miracle of art. In magnificent contrast, the young man is presented alongside Hector, the noble, faithful and pious man, a hero by virtue of his sensitive conscience and his sense of duty—all that Achilles possesses through his rich and marvellous nature. Such is their antagonism, and such is their resemblance, something that certainly makes the ending all the more tragic, when Achilles appears as Hector's mortal enemy…'.

However, what makes Achilles' fate so tragic is not so much his rivalry with Hector, but rather the fact that he was 'so strong and yet so defenceless, born for such a brief time, being the most perfect and yet most fleeting flower in the world of heroes', destined for an early death.
'Precisely because is so beautiful', adds Hölderlin, in such a way that
'precisely because' can only apply to him. For Homer, Achilles's occupation of the highest place among humans is irrevocable. His outstanding beauty is so fundamental that Homer mentions it in passing

when, in the Iliad (2.473), he alludes to the second most handsome hero. The wedding, from which the most handsome hero was born, still represented for this reason the most crucial moment in the history of the Greek mythological world, when on that occasion the goddess Eris threw the famous apple to the fairest of all the guests present. It became the most crucial and decisive moment for the predominance of the tragic in the exemplary destiny of humans, because from it was born supreme heroism, worthy of a divinity, not only overshadowed by all the darkness of an archaic warrior's life, but at the same time implying the greatest mortality.

The legend of how Achilles is led to a white island of bliss, where he is granted immortality and given as a wife either Helen, the fairest of women, or Medea, the moon-born granddaughter of Helios, does not dispel the dark mist of earthly mortality—that willing acceptance of death which, with noble fury, haunts his fiery mind in the *Iliad*. Thetis, advised by Themis, becomes the wife of Peleus, a mortal hero, so that she might bear this son, who is likewise mortal. What a turning point the wedding might have been for the history of the world, what an upheaval for the formation of its order, if from that union Achilles had been born as the immortal son of Zeus or Poseidon! The tradition, known to Pindar and Aeschylus, alludes to this through a prophecy of Themis.

The secret, the possession of which makes Prometheus feel superior to the king of the gods, corresponded to a redemptive possibility very much in the Greek style. The striking thought that could momentarily illuminate the figure of Achilles, and even embellish it, intensified the pain he felt for someone who, created in that way, was so fleeting. What would the world have been like if he—so beautiful and strong, so different from the greedy kings, the power-hungry rulers such as Agamemnon and even Zeus himself—if this being who is now inflamed with rage, now softened by compassion—just as Achilles is moved by Priam—without having to submit to death, had been the one to rule the world instead of Zeus? That simultaneity—of possibility and impossibility—cast its light in the account of the events leading up to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis upon the son of the goddess, upon the long-awaited one. Prometheus considered him to be the greatest threat, albeit a chimerical one, to the dominant power of Zeus.

In this way, the Greek conception of the world also retains its completeness. However, from now on its limitations become apparent to us, not only from the perspective of the existing state of the world—which could just as easily give way to another—but also in relation to human beings and their needs. What remains for humanity?, we ask ourselves. What salvation – or what solution? Can a solution still be surmised from the remnants of Aeschylus's trilogy?

11. PROMETHEUS UNCHAINED

THE LAST PROPHECY IN PROMETHEUS BOUND

We are approaching the remnants of *Prometheus Lyomenos*, the lost final drama of the trilogy, but we shall not do so without first preparing ourselves. In this work, as the title suggests, Prometheus is set free. Whether the breaking of his chains was a mere ‘solution’ or whether it deserves to be described as ‘salvation’ – though not in an absolute Buddhist or Gnostic sense, nor solely in the sense of the enlightenment to which we have just referred – may be left open for the moment. Prometheus himself had already foretold that he would be freed by Heracles, a thirteenth-generation grandson of Io. Hermes, at the end of the Desmotes, recounts how this came to pass, and following what kind of tortures and the fulfilment of what unspeakable conditions. And we are also immediate witnesses to the manner in which the first part of his threats came to pass, of how Zeus strikes the Titan with his thunderbolt and casts him into Tartarus. The rest is reserved for the third tragedy (1020–29):

When you have served a long stretch of time, you shall

return once more to the light; but Zeus’s winged dog,

the bloodthirsty eagle, will voraciously reduce your body to a great rag, an

uninvited guest who appears every day,

and devour your black liver as if it were food.

Do not expect this torment to end

until a god appears who will take over your labours

and is willing to descend into gloomy Hades and the dark abysses of Tartarus!

THE PAIN OF THE BODY

First, then, the new torture. Whereas in Desmotes' Prometheus the image of injustice predominates, here it is a painful, permanently open wound: the suffering of the body. Cicero speaks of this kind of suffering, of pain, as an evil – which, according to certain philosophers, is even the most intense – of human existence, and refers, translated into Latin (Tusc. Disp. 2. 10), to Prometheus's great speech from Aeschylus's third drama. In the second tragedy, it was the elements that were to bear witness to the injustices suffered by Prometheus. The chained man on the Caucasus, in this third drama, calls out to his blood relatives who have been set free:

O race of Titans, sister of my blood, begotten of heaven,

behold me bound and chained

to the rugged rocks, like a ship which, in the dreadful roar of the sea,

the sailors, fearing the night, anchor trembling.

Thus has Zeus nailed me fast,

And the spirit of Zeus has made use of the hands of Hephaestus.

It was he who, driving these nails into me with cruel skill, broke

my limbs, and I, wretched man that I am, pierced by such skill,

dwell upon this rock of the Furies.

As if that were not enough, every third fateful day,

tearing at me with her hooked claws in her fateful flight, the

handmaiden of Zeus tears me apart in a savage feast.

Then, once she is sated and satisfied with my fatty

liver, she utters a dreadful cry and, taking flight with

the feathers of her tail, cleanses my blood.

But when the gnawed liver swells and renews itself, she

returns once more, ravenous, to her repulsive feast.

In this way I nourish this guardian of my painful torment, who,

whilst I am still alive, humiliates me with her ceaseless torment.

In fact, as you can see, bound by Zeus's chains, I cannot drive

the ominous bird from my breast.

Thus I, a widow of myself, suffer this agonising destruction, seeking in the desire

for death the end of my misfortune.

Yet by Zeus's will, I am far from death.

To invoke a chorus of Titans such as that, as we know it from the classical period, is still a rather unusual occurrence in the Greek theatrical scene; and yet it is conceivable if we consider that the tragic mask was originally reserved for phantasmal apparitions manifesting from the underworld.84 The Titans of the Heidelberg Fragment apparently came from the underworld. Here, in the Lyomenos, the setting and, apparently, the time are different. 'For it was Zeus, the eternal one, who set the Titans free,' as explained in Pindar's fourth Pythian Ode (291), 'in time, when the wind abates, the sails will be changed'. The most plausible explanation for the liberation of the Titans is that they had already served thirty thousand years of punishment. For Prometheus, the punishment begins later. Here too, one must look back to events which, for Aeschylus, formed part of the mythological tradition, in a tradition that would probably feature

in the Titanomachy, should it have been recorded anywhere. After Prometheus, the herald of the Titans, helped Zeus achieve victory, he may have celebrated his wedding to Hesione, a goddess, and not, as it later appears, merely in the figure of a heroine: at that time the song of the daughters of Oceanus still echoed, alluding to the bride's bath and the bridal bed, which still survives in memory in the Prometheus Desmotes
(556). Finally, the battle and the primordial sacrifice break out in Mecona, followed by the theft of fire and the punishment, whilst the other Titans had long since taken their seats in Erebus.

Under no circumstances should one imagine that Aeschylus, with the group now approaching, was merely using pseudonyms for the figures in the Hesiodic genealogy. It has not been handed down, nor is it credible, that the six Titanides, recognised as great and venerable goddesses, were all present. The goddess Gaia, mother not only of the Titans though not herself a Titaness, is mentioned alongside Heracles and after Hermes in the cast of the Desmotes, perhaps related to the Lyomenos; she undoubtedly plays another role in this tragedy and not merely that of the chorus leader. Regardless of which of the primordial gods, previously vanquished and now reappeared, leads the chorus, he not only announces the arrival of the group of ghostly kin – 'to watch', as stated in a quotation (Fr. 190) – but also sings a song with them, to describe the archaic and mythological path they have left behind (Fr. 192):

On the sacred purple sands of the

Red Sea,

in the sparkling mineral-rich waters of the lagoon,

near Oceanus, near everything,

of the Ethiopians, where Helios,

he who always sees all things, his immortal body and

horses exhausted by the march, find respite in the bath

in the warm tide of

the gentle waters.

Beyond this sun-drenched land and this sunlit pond, beyond the realms of Helios, dwell the primordial gods, the most ancient forces of the surrounding cosmos, who have come to witness the events at the heart of the third tragedy, just as the theme of injustice dominates the second, and in relation to that pain and moral suffering, is depicted with even greater intensity. If the aspect of the injustice of human existence, embodied by a titanic figure, in the second tragedy constitutes the polar opposite of the blissful existence of the Olympian gods, represented by Hephaestus and Hermes, here we witness an even more horrific aspect of this same existence: the very torture suffered in one's own body, a spectacle worthy of seeing that provokes compassion, even from primordial beings who for thousands of years have been atoning for their own sins in Tartarus. It represents an absolutely commendable polar opposite, even for their non-Olympian and more elemental existence! The intensity is revealed at this point with such particular poignancy that Prometheus cries out for the first time for an end to be brought about through death:

Seeking the end of evil in the love of death

Seeking the end of misfortune in the death he desires

This is how Cicero conveys it, quoting Aeschylus unequivocally.

In this way, the poet drives the tragedy to the ultimate consequence of the mode of existence endured by Prometheus. The hope of immortality offers solace in the face of injustice. Whilst Prometheus recognises his nature as that of the immortal gods, he does not fully immerse himself in the human way of life. Yet he is also forced to endure, alongside injustice, the concomitant aspect of that human existence: physical pain. His own

immortality, his inability to die, becomes meaningless, and existence exposed to injustice and suffering seeks to end, according to its own law, with the only way out granted to humans: death. The god who represents the human pole opposite to that of the Titans and the Olympians has descended to the lowest level of human existence, to pain and amor mortis, to pain and the will to die. Prometheus himself renounces his last, beautifully conceived hope. Prophecies lose their value when death is desired before its time, without waiting for their expected fulfilment.

IMMORTALS WHO LONG TO DIE

In the third tragedy, the hero, despite his divinity, can fall into the most dreadful abysses. Faced with this situation, as well as speaking of Prometheus's liberation and the 'solution' offered to him by Zeus – in the sense attributed to the term 'solution' in a problematic situation – one cannot help but speak likewise of a 'salvation'. There, too, a problematic situation effectively arises. Where has Prometheus been banished? To the very edge of the world of mortals. A location that is 'geographical' only insofar as the place of torment for mortal humans was still accessible to them, though they could never endure the magnitude of that pain (they would perish first); a location that could not be found amongst the inhabitants of the earth, the primordial men or the beings of nature, but only in the remotest reaches, at the very edge, where it could be likened to the Caucasus.

However, it makes no sense to ask whether the Caucasus, where he now receives his blood relatives, is the same rocky mountain where he was visited by the daughters of Oceanus. The Titans, being a place situated on the border, can reach it by coming from the land of the Sun, which, from the west, passing through the south, stretches as far as the east. Meanwhile, Prometheus also suffers below, in the underworld, where Zeus cast him at the end of the second tragedy, and he is likewise counted among the penitents of Hades.85 Up and down and then up again and at the boundary: in no case is this a place defined in geographical terms, but it is more definable mythologically and existentially than as the result of the situation of a lunar being, one who remains floating with his pain amidst absolute divinity

and human vulnerability and suffering. From that place of suffering, there can be only two ways out: either to be human and die—something which Zeus's order does not permit the god Prometheus—or to be a god, and not to continue enduring the painful fate of humans, a fate to which the Titan has condemned himself, and to which he is now, in the world of Zeus, confined.

The solution to the problem of liberation at the end of the tragedy becomes understandable if grounded in this situation. The strangeness of the solution cited in the transmission, on the other hand, confirms the strangeness of the situation described, the one that corresponds to it. Faced with this, attempting to put forward any kind of conjecture would amount to a vague presumption. Hermes' final prophecy in 'Prometheus Bound' ends with these words:

Do not expect this torment to end

until a god appears who will take over your labours and is

willing to descend into gloomy Hades

and the dark abysses of Tartarus!

One of the gods himself, as the representative and heir to the torments – διάδοχος πόνων – of Prometheus, who is also prepared to take his place in the darkness of Hades, in the depths of Tartarus: something that seems impossible when first heard, and which, precisely, represents the condition for the titan's liberation. And, if we pay closer attention, we shall also notice the tone of the prophecy: the condition has been set forth in all seriousness. To die and suffer in Hades is not impossible in the world of Zeus. But, of all the gods, which of them would be willing to make the exchange so that Prometheus might take his place among the true immortals, the gods of the upper world, those of earth and sky, unless his entry into Hades were to bring him some solace? Might it not be possible that his sufferings would be eased in the depths of the earth? These were questions that Aeschylus, when faced with a tradition and confronting it, probably did not ask himself.

But who could be that god who wished to die? And who offered to represent him? The god who hoped to die, or some other?

The one offered in the *Prometheus Lyomenos* must have been Heracles. Just as Io in the *Desmotes*, it was now the son of Zeus who set out in search of the apples of the Hesperides. The garden of the Hesperides lay at the edge of the world, beyond the shoulders of Atlas, regardless of whether he bore the axis of the heavens in the west or the north. Just as the group of Titans arrived from the south, so too did Heracles – perhaps after having slain Emation, a son of Eos and Tithonus, the two Levantine gods – reach the edge of the world where the suffering Prometheus lay.86 It was a day on which the chained Prometheus awaited the arrival of the tormenting eagle. Aeschylus departs here from Hesiod, in the sense that, according to him, the terrible bird appeared only every other day. (Only! So that Prometheus might feel his hope dashed – the hope of one who is regularly tormented! – that perhaps on that occasion it would not come). It was still early in the morning, and the hero stood before him. Was it at that very moment that he cried out, or did he do so later? (Fr. 201):

ἐχθροῦ πατρός μοι τοῦτο φίλτατον τέκνον

His most beloved son, yet hated by his father!

The transmission of this verse merely assures us that the sufferer's pain has not yet been able to break him. He had learnt to love death, but not Zeus. There are also accounts of certain passages describing the path, which Prometheus now entrusts to Heracles to guide him to the garden of the Hesperides. Then the eagle approaches, and the hunter of all deadly monsters awakens within the son of Zeus. He discovers traces of blood on the tail feathers of the giant bird.
What has he learnt from Prometheus? What does he need to have learnt? He calls upon the
'hunter Apollo' (Fr. 200):

Agreus, son of Apollo, guide my arrow with certainty

Agreus, Apollo, guide my arrow with certainty!

Thus the eagle was hunted down. But did this mean Prometheus's liberation? Was Heracles permitted to remove the chains? Who could have prevented him? The thunder of the father? Did the earth tremble and did Gaia appear, who now maintained the rigidly established order in the world of Zeus? Was she the one charged with telling them both that it was impossible? Was Prometheus to be returned to the darkness with his sufferings, if he could not find a god willing to swap places with him? In the mythological tradition, in a summary of the mythology of the gods and heroes bearing the name of the scholar Apollodorus, there are two accounts in which Heracles appears to have offered Zeus a swap with the centaur Chiron, a god who wished to die. On the one hand (2, 5, 11), there is no doubt that Heracles was the subject of the phrase:

παρέσχε τῶι Διὶ Χείρωνα θνήσκειν ἀθάνατον ἀντ᾽ αὐτοῦ θέλοντα

But on the other hand (2, 5, 4), for the sentence to make sense, the name ought to appear in it.87 There, too, we are told the story88 that in the Foloe mountains, during his battle with the centaurs, an arrow fired by the son of Zeus struck Chiron—whom he revered—in the knee. However, he could not heal him because his arrows had been dipped in the poisonous blood of the Lernaean Hydra. The wounded man, an immortal son of Cronus, withdrew with his incurable wound to his cave, and there, like Prometheus in the Caucasus, he waited for his redemption to come.

Chiron, as explained in the Titanomachy (Fr. 6), was the one who had guided the human race along the path of justice by teaching the oath and sacrifice and the signs of the heavens:

εἰς τε δικαιοσύνην γένος ἤγαγε δείξας

ὅρκους καὶ θυσίας ἱερὰς καὶ σχήματ᾽ Ὀλύμπου.

This is undoubtedly why, in the Iliad (11.832), he was known as the most just of the centaurs. Although Aeschylus may not have been the originator of the notion that Chiron offered to take the place of the benefactor of humanity89 – a possibility that cannot be entirely ruled out – in his tragedy the substitution was particularly significant. The fact that such a substitute had to appear and that someone could take on Prometheus's suffering compels us, in a sense, to speak of 'redemption'. Not only because of the substitution itself, but because the acceptability of the substitution would indicate the existential nature of that suffering: a suffering that is not merely that of a single person, but is inherent to existence itself. Whether in Prometheus's case or that of anyone else: someone continues to endure the suffering whilst the group of gods endures without interruption. And when salvation is attained from such depths, one can speak of 'redemption'.

REDEMPTION

The situation was incredibly unusual: the redemption of Prometheus!
How many complementary contradictions were contained within her! Heracles, the liberator, could not bear Prometheus's sufferings. Heracles was capable of inflicting incurable pain upon him, albeit unintentionally, since his true purpose was to honour him. This was what he did to Chiron. And Chiron, as the primordial healer and tutor to famous heroes – including in the art of healing – knew that his poisonous wound could never be healed. In that centaur, son of Cronus, of almost the same birthright as Zeus, lay the saviour: ready to vanish into the underworld, in Prometheus's stead, and carrying with him the wound inflicted by Heracles. A healer who, like a sick animal, hides his pain in the darkness of his cave, and longs to die there. The contradictory and the complementary were inherent in Chiron's very essence: as a healer he was afflicted by suffering, and as an immortal he bore the pain of others. As Prometheus's redeemer, the healer became

an unusual guarantor and permanent witness to this painful aspect of our existence.

So far we have only reached the presentation of the proposal, in which Heracles suggests to Zeus, the king-god, that he exchange Chiron for Prometheus. Before Zeus consents, that which has already been prophesied in *Prometheus Bound* must take place. A precondition for liberation must still be fulfilled. The Titan speaks in a tone very different from that which he normally employs in his prophecies. The daughters of Oceanus, influenced by the effect of Prometheus's astonishing inventions and his achievements in making life easier, already regard him as a god no less than Zeus (508–510):

For I have hope that once freed from these chains, your power will be

no less than that of Zeus.

Prometheus, however, responds with austerity (511–13):

The Fate that brings all things to pass has not decreed that this should come to pass in this way,

but rather that, having been subdued by endless sorrows and misfortunes, I must

thus escape from my chains.

Here the word 'broken' (καμφθείς) is the key. When Prometheus greets Heracles, the son of the hated father, he is not yet broken. His hatred for Zeus was waning when the resistance of the entire world order stood in the way of his liberation, when he felt compelled to acknowledge that suffering, even if he did not bear it himself, would continue to exist. Had the goddess Gaia, Mother Earth herself, told him this? This void could not be filled. But now the Titan yielded and revealed his secret knowledge—or rather, that of his mother Themis—and

It can be stated with absolute certainty that this was a secret concerning the possible successor to the throne of the god-king. This is confirmed – in addition to the preparatory scenes in the Desmontes – by two accounts. One can be found in the Late Antiquity commentary on Virgil's Sixth Eclogue. The poem mentions the 'birds of the Caucasus' and the 'theft of Prometheus' (42). An ancient commentator refers to this when he recounts at length, whilst a younger one does so briefly,90 what the content of Prometheus Unbound might be, and that Heracles, having hunted the eagle, fears to free the chained titan so as not to offend his father. Prometheus then addresses Zeus to warn him that he should not marry Thetis, as a son sired with her would overthrow him. Zeus, in gratitude for the warning, frees the Titan from his chains, and to commemorate his imprisonment, presents him with a crown and a ring. This signifies Prometheus' redemption in accordance with an order whose essence is reflected in the second tragedy with these words (50):

ἐλεύθερος γὰρ οὔτις ἐστὶ πλὴν Διός

No one, except Zeus, is free.

A more significant witness, predating Virgil's commentators, is the poet Catullus, even if his account does not entirely convince us that all the details mentioned by the commentators can be attributed with certainty to Aeschylus. Catullus, certainly, must have obtained some information from an Alexandrian poem, for in describing the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (64, 295) he also includes Prometheus among the group of divine guests,

Exhausted, bearing the traces of past suffering

'bears the faded scar of the ancient punishment': the ring. Should he not, after all, be grateful to him that this wedding was taking place instead of the union of the god-king with Thetis? If he could now walk before Zeus, before his wife and children, it was thanks to his own merits, earned in the famous scene of the

tragedy. For, according to the epic tradition reflected in the Cypria, it was the counsellor Themis herself who should have appeared there. But did the ring, which recalled the counsellor's past sufferings, also come from Prometheus Lyomenos?

The ring is an element that cannot be attributed with absolute certainty to the final scene of Prometheus Unbound, nor can it be ruled out that Aeschylus chose it because of the veneration shown towards the Cabiri of Samothrace. On Samothrace, the neighbouring island of Lemnos, the significance of the signs of remembrance and the mystical bonds forged between those initiated into the mysteries of the Cabiri and the great enigmatic deities were preserved until late antiquity through iron rings. From the texts91 relating to the custom of wearing rings in antiquity, it can already be deduced that iron rings represented a sign of belonging to the cult of Samothrace, and even more so following the discovery of the first ring of this type within the precincts of the Cabiri sanctuary itself.92 If Aeschylus or some other poet, following his reconciliation with Zeus, had the Titan appear wearing this emblem, he would surely not have done so without drawing upon the tradition concerning both Prometheus and the Cabiri. The basis – common to both mythical spheres, and transmissible for this very reason – undoubtedly related to the bestowal of the ring, the emblem of forgiveness for the Titans' transgressions. The confession of sins formed part of the initiation ceremonies into the mysteries of Samothrace.93

The two possibilities—that Aeschylus had decided to place the scene of the ring's presentation at the end of the trilogy, and that a Hellenistic poet had first linked it with the presentation of the crown—as a second form of forgiveness and reconciliation—coexist side by side. The decision was not an easy one for Aeschylus, as reconstructing the scene would then have required venturing too far into the realm of the unknown. Another character would have been needed to offer the ring or, had it been possible to separate it from Prometheus's chain, to convey the lesson of Zeus's ring. Two images on Etruscan mirrors, reflecting the general state of Greek mythology around 400 BC, effectively depict the liberation of Prometheus in the company of two figures who assist him.94 In one of the images, Heracles and Apollo can be seen on either side of the chained Prometheus, which in Aeschylus corresponds to the invocation of

‘Agreus Apollo’. On the other, however, it appears as though these are the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux – the two stars positioned above the titan’s head also point towards them – and both are holding a ring in their hands. The inscriptions, featuring the eagle on the ground and the attributes of Heracles, show us that he, under the name Calanice, Kallinikos, had taken Polux’s place. The ring on his hand makes sense, since he too, even if the messenger is Castor, needs forgiveness for having killed the eagle. He and his twin brother, who here is replaced by another son of Zeus, by the eagle’s killer, formed a pair of Cabiri on Samothrace. We learn that it was they who brought the ring, or at least one of them, but it is not certain that this occurred in Aeschylus.

However, something different happens with the crown. Aeschylus tells us in *Lyomenos* that men began to crown their heads with garlands in honour of Prometheus, instead of their chains, and this is how the tradition has been handed down to us (Fr. 202). From that moment on, wearing a garland became synonymous with living the human condition in the Greek manner. And previously, it was not necessary to wear any garland for Prometheus. What distinguished the wreaths from the flexible branches that grew everywhere was their shape: the curvature, called coróne in Greek. A term that had been derived into Latin as corona, and had the primary meaning of garland. One can see in the images on the vases from the sanctuaries of the Cabiri in Thebes how the grotesque creatures representing the Cabiri or the primordial men on their way to the celebration and initiation95 wear branches rather than crowns upon their heads: the garlands seem to signify the rite of initiation itself. Prometheus, having ‘bowed down’, as he himself had announced in the second tragedy, and as seems to emerge from the situation, as well as from the language and the object, also ‘bows down’ the first garland – the Greek word κάμπτειν, kámptein, has the same meaning.

In the passage in question, in which Heracles offers his father to exchange Prometheus for Chiron, we read that he chose an olive branch ‘by way of a chain’, since he too, following his violent act against Zeus’s order, needed atonement and reconciliation, expressed in the form and manner of carrying the olive branch. In Attica, the region of the olive trees, it was most common to wear olive garlands, as a way of honouring the benefactor titan. To form Prometheus’s crown, other branches are also listed, as reported by various sources,

similar to those of the willow, such as those of the lygos or agno, the chaste tree. This plant, which flourishes magnificently during its summer flowering season, dominates the landscape of Samothrace and Samos, the island of Hera.

The scholar Athenaeus, quoting Menodotus (627 BC), the writer from Samos, tells us that the indigenous inhabitants of that island, the Carians, wore garlands of lygos. A very ancient broom tree, the lygos, was even sacred to Hera herself, for, according to the tradition of Samos, she had been born beneath it. And by crowning herself with a wreath of broom, she surely established a link with the great goddess, but perhaps not in her aspect as a queen ruling in all her splendour, but in a different aspect. In the course of her disappearance, during the phase of greatest opacity of her lunar being,96 the cult image of Hera hid itself in a thicket of lygos. And the crown of lygos, worn voluntarily in submission as in a rite, was also characteristic of the Promethean being, as we have seen: it corresponds to the lunar being overshadowed by the suffering of human existence. The crown of the liberated Prometheus, whether an olive branch or a broom branch, encircling the head as if it were a folded ribbon, as a recognition and eloquent sign of the solution and redemption, of atonement and reconciliation with Zeus, characterised by the crown as a bond of conscious acceptance of a being eternally deprived of peace, subjected to injustice, who suffers from his own darkness, of someone who can no longer bear to be exposed to the implacable laws of a luminous and steadfast heaven.

However, Prometheus's wound was not forgotten. It could heal of its own accord, like the wounds of the gods. Or was it Chiron who appeared on the scene and healed the Titan, before he himself, overcome by pain, threw himself into the underworld? In a more recent depiction, though one that must date back at least to the 3rd century BC, Chiron is replaced by the god who, by that time, had already taken on the role of the healing centaur throughout the Ancient World. On an Etruscan mirror, discovered in a tomb near Bolsena, a scene can be seen that moves us deeply.97 It reminds us of the moment when Christ is taken down from the cross. In the background a temple can be glimpsed, and in front of it Prometheus is recognisable, in a posture suggesting he has just descended from his rock at that very moment. He leans on a god and a goddess, whilst Heracles rests beside him. The goddess is Athena, the god is Asclepius, in the

form of a handsome youth, who for Prometheus – as for all humanity – is the saviour.

12. THE FINAL SONG, ACCORDING TO GOETHE

The words with which Aeschylus expresses the final resolution in *Prometheus Unbound* have not been preserved. Goethe's words on the 'borders of humanity' – those limits which, for the Greeks, revealed both the harshness of the surrounding world and the figures of the eternal gods – sound decidedly softer and more effusive than Aeschylus's words could ever have sounded. Yet, in their recognition and stance, they certainly come closer to the Greek meaning of the redeemed Prometheus:

When the holy father of

eternal age

scatters with a light hand from

the rumbling clouds rays that

bless

upon the earth,

I shall kiss the hem of

his robe,

with a childlike tremor in my

breast.

For no man can measure

himself against the gods

.

If he climbs upwards
and touches the stars
with the crown of his
head
then his unsteady feet lack all
support,
and the clouds
and the wind play
with him.

Yet, if he stands firm
with strong bones, upon
the earth’s enduring
foundation;
he cannot reach those
above; only the oak
or the vine, he ceases
not to compare himself.

What distinguishes the gods from men?
That many waves
had previously broken,

of those,

in an eternal movement; the

wave lifts us up,

the wave devours

and we sink.

A small circle confines

our lives,

and many generations

are permanently incorporated into

the infinite chain

of its existence.

NOTES

1.

Comp. José Ortega andGasset, Über die Jagd, Rowohlt Deutsche Enzyklopädie, vol. 42, Hamburg, 1957.

2.

Emil Staiger, Goethe 1749–1786, Zurich, 1952. His interpretation of the Prometheus poems follows the first version of this study in Albae Vigilae N. F. IV, Zurich, 1946, and is taken into account here without further critical notes.

3.

This is not the case with Humphry Trevelyan, Goethe und die Griechen. (Translated from the English), Hamburg, 1949, p. 74.

4.

Ortega y Gasset and Thomas Mann, who mentions the former in his speech 'Freud and the Future'; then Jung/Kerényi, Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie, Hildesheim 1980 [Spanish edition available: Introducción a la esencia de la mitología, Siruela, Madrid, 2012]

5.

Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie, p. 41 ff.

6.

Ernst Beutler in Volume 4 of the Artemis edition, p. 1038.

7.

'Der Mensch in griechischer Anschauung', in K. Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, pp. 427–443. The deilon is wretchedness, the daimon extraordinary talent.

8.

Nor did Karl Reinhardt, who sought to attribute such an essential feature of the tradition—namely, the titanic nature of Prometheus—to Aeschylus's poetic creation or renewal, and devised his own comic Titanomachy in opposition to the Titanomachy, when the latter might already have contained it: Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologue, Bern, 1949, p. 30.

9.

Paula Philippson, Studies über the Greek Myth-Genealogy as a Mythical Form, Zurich, 1944.

10.

The Gods of Greece. 2nd ed., Frankfurt am Main, 1934, 42.

11.

Kerényi, The Virgin and Mother of Greek Religion, Albae Vigilae.
N. F. XIII, Zurich, 1952.

12.

Kerényi, Zeus and Hera, Saeculum 1, 1950, issue 2, 250.

13.

Pylos Fr. 1202: Pindar, Isthm. 5. 1.

14.

Kerényi, The Spiritual Path of Europe, Albae Vigilae N. F. XII, Zurich, 1955, comp. therein: The Gods and World History, pp. 38–50.

15.

W. F. Otto, Eranos Yearbook 24, 1955, 326.

16.

Observation by J. Dörigs in his dissertation Der Kampf der Götter und Titanen, Bibl. Helv. Romana, Olten and Lausanne, 1961.

17.

Pylos in 04, 6. Johannes Sundwall noted (in a personal communication) in 1951 regarding the Hittite hieroglyph titas, ‘father’ (according to a reading by Gelb), Etymologie aus dem Illyrischen, P. Kretzschmer, Glotta, 14, 1925, 309 ff.

18.

K. Kerényi, ‘The Divine Physician’, in this volume, Part One, and on this struggle of the gods, in Die Mythologie der Griechen, Part Two: Die Heroengeschichten, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 134 ff.

19.

K. Kerényi, Daughters of the Sun. Reflections on Greek Deities, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 133 ff.; Saeculum I, 1950, issue 2, 250.

20.

To ensure an accurate rendering that respects the epic form, two older translations were used: that by J. H. Voss and that by Ed. Eyth.

21.

Theon. Schol. Arat. 254 p, 386, 5 Maass.

22.

Schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.444 and Prokl. Schol. Hes. Erga 48.

23.

Schol. Ap. Rhod. 3.1086, from which Schol. Od. 10.2 differs.

24.

A parallel: Jung/Kerényi/Radin, Der göttliche Schelm, Zurich, 1954, 169 (‘Le fripon divin’, Geneva, 1958, 160).

25.

Some images on ancient vases also depict this cruel form of binding (in Die Mithologie der Griechen. Part 1: ‘Die Götter und Menschheitsgeschichten’, Stuttgart, 1997, Fig. 52) if not of Prometheus, merely bound to a pillar, opposite Atlas, and behind him the serpent succinctly indicates, by showing him a skin, that he is already before the Garden of the Hesperides.

26.

C. O. Thulin, Die Götter des Martianus Capella und der Bronzeleber von Piacenza, Giessen, 1906, 16 ff. and Die etruskische Disciplin II, Gothenburg, 1906, 20 ff., in which they also attribute to Prometheus, via Schol. Aisch. Prom. 484, parallels and Babylonian evidence of the Greek spectacle of the liver.

27.

The rationale behind this interpretation stands in contrast to so-called 'positivism', taking into account the ethnological parallels in Kerényi, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, p. 283 ff.

28.

K. Kerényi, Antike Religion, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 101 ff.; the sacrifice of Prometheus is also linked to the Greek ideal of sacrifice. [Spanish edition available: La religión antigua, Herder, Barcelona, 2011]

29.

He accuses Hesiod of 'malicious intent', attributing to him the meaning that Zeus did not grant fire to the ash trees – to the trees, not the nymphs! – so that men could not make fire with ash wood.

30.

K. Kerényi, 'Hermes, the Guide of Souls', Part II of this book.

31.

P. Philippson, Untersuchungen über den griechischen Mythos, Zurich, 1944, 27, 7.

32.

K. Kerényi, Ancient Religion, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 82.

33.

Mules.

34.

In addition to Aeschylus: Sophocles, Oed. col. 56; Euripides, Ion 455, Phoin. 1122.

35.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks. Part II: The Heroic Tales, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 254 ff.

36.

Plato, Epinomis 987c, as another way of reading Kronu aster. Franz Boll, Arch. Rel.-Wiss. 19, 1916–19, 342 ff., showed how this was based on an ancient tradition.

37.

So misunderstood by L. Séchan, ‘Le mythe de Prométhée’, Paris, 1951, 12, as by others, who failed to perceive the philosophical shift in the scientific view.

38.

K. Kerényi, Die Mythologie der Griechen, Part II, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 163.

39.

Pliny, Nat. Hist. 7.209: Prometheus was the first to kill an ox.

40.

S. Eitrem, Eranos, Gothenburg, 1946, 14 ff.

41.

K. Kérenyi, Die Mythologie of Greeks, Part I: The Gods and the History of Humanity, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 123.

42.

The Tales and Images, Part I (note 25), p. 159 ff. and figs. 47–50.

43.

Schol. Od. 10. 2. There are Clímene and Prileie, perhaps in place of Pronoe.

44.

Hecaton, Fragments of Greek History 1, fol. 13.

45.

Tzetzes in his commentary on Lycophron 132. 219.

46.

Fr. 1206 po-ti-ni-ja a-si-wi-ja.

47.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part II (note 35), p. 131.

48.

Tzetzes' commentary on Lycophron 1283.

49.

Inscr. Gr. XII 8. 74.

50.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part I (note 25), p. 68 ff.

51.

K. Kerényi, Mysteries of the Cabiri. In this volume, Part III.

52.

Commentary by the learned Patriarch Photius, who also refers to them as Titans.

53.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part I (note 25), p. 70 ff.

54.

Fragm. hist. gr. 76 F 47; Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part I (note 25), p. 94.

55.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks. Part I (note 25), p. 92.

56.

K. Kerényi, The Virgin and Mother in Greek Religion, Zurich, 1952, 41.

57.

K. Kerényi, Greek Miniatures: Work and Myth, Zurich, 1957, 139–157.

58.

Kerényi on this concept, Apollon und Niobe, Munich-Vienna, 1980, pp. 64–79.

59.

Lobel, in The Oxyrhynchus Papyri XX, London, 1952, I.

60.

J. D. Beazley, American Journal of Archaeology 43, 1939, 618 ff.

61.

Siegmann, Literarisch. Griech. Texte from Heidelberg Papyrus Collection, Heidelberg, 1956, 21 ff.

62.

K. Reinhardt, Hermes 85, 1957, 12 ff.

63.

Especially Amer. Journ. Archeol. 43, 1939, tablet XIII below

64.

Wolters/Bruns, The Cabiri Sanctuary near Thebes I, Berlin, 1940, pl. 5.

65.

R. Gardi, Der schwarze Hephästus, Bern, 1954, a work on tablets.

66.

From K. Reinhardt's Hermes, 85, 1957, 15; and part of his other commentary is based on the assumption that the fragment belongs to the Phyrphoros, and that this is a continuation of the Lyomenos: a mistaken supposition.

67.

K. Kerényi, Unwillkürliche Kunstreisen. In Auf den Spuren des Mythos, Munich-Vienna, 1969, pp. 65–181.

68.

Tania Blixen, Africa, a darkly alluring world, Rororo, 133, 195.

69.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part I (note 25), p. 155.

70.

Beazley's essay mentioned above (note 60), 43, 1939, 618, is instructive for understanding this.

71.

The hollow of the ferula stem, of the ferula communis, was also used as tinder, as Walther Kraus quite rightly points out in his article on Prometheus, 694, when he mentions it in his bibliographical index. Evidence of its use on the islands can be found in F. G. Welcker, Die Aeschylische Trilogie, Darmstadt, 1824, 8, 8., and J. G. Frazer, Apollodorus I 52 note.

72.

Hyginus, Astron. 2. 15.

73.

Both versions in Kerényi, Die Mythologie der Griechen, Part I (note 25), p. 159 ff., all sources in Kraus 694, the depictions in
K. Robert, Sarkophagreliefs, Berlin, 1919, III 3, and in particular 351.

74.

‘The sea rages against Attica, between the island and the mainland’.

75.

Hipp. Ref. her. 5. 6. 3.

76.

Commentary by Hesychius.

77.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks. Part II (note 35), p. 202.

78.

Athenaios 428. F.

79.

In the translation by I. G. Droysens, which occasionally improves certain nuances, albeit at the expense of the verse, to bring it closer to spoken language.

80.

Paus. 9. 35. 2; Hyginus, Fabulae 183.

81.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part I (note 25), p. 79 ff.

82.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part II (note 35), p. 244.

83.

Zur Aesthetik, from the edition of Insel's complete works, 709. The sketches on Achilles, by their style, belong to the circle of Hyperion's works, and should find their place in volume III of the major Stuttgart edition. As a complement to Holderlin's image of Achilles, see K. Kerényi, Die Mythologie der Griechen, Part II (note 35), pp. 269–279.

84.

K. Kerényi, 'Naissance et renaissance de la tragédie', Diogène 23, 1959.

85.

Horace, Carm. 2. 13. 37; 18. 35; Epodes 17. 67.

86.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part II (note 35), p. 139 ff.

87.

The supplement was found by Kraus, p. 679.

88.

K. Kerényi, The Mythology of the Greeks, Part II (note 35), p. 122 ff.

89.

K. Kerényi, ‘The Divine Physician’, Part II of this book.

90.

The longer version is known as the Probus, and the shorter one as the Servius.

91.

F. G. Welcker (note 71), p. 52.

92.

K. Kerényi. Unwillkürliche Kunstreisen (note 67), p. 144 ff.

93.

K. Kerényi, ‘Die Geburt der Helena’. In Humanistische Seelenforschung, Stuttgart, 1996, pp. 42–53.

94.

Gerhard, Etruscan Mirrors 2, pp. 139 and 138.

95.

Wolters/Bruns, The Cabiri Sanctuary at Thebes (note 64), plate 33.

96.

K. Kerényi, Zeus and Hera, Saeculum I, 1950, 245.

97.

Depicted in K. Kerényi, Prometheus, New York, 1962, tablet XIV.

ABBREVIATIONS

RE

G. Wissowa, Paulys Realencyklopädie of classischen Altertumswissenschaft, Stuttgart, 1893 ff.

Roscher

W. H. Roscher's Comprehensive Lexicon of Greek and Roman Mythology I–VI, Leipzig, 1884–1937.

EPILOGUE

*Primitive Images of Greek Religion is the fifth and final volume of Karl Kerényi's works published by Klett-Cotta as a separate edition. The aim of this collection is to make available once again those books from the vast output of the Hungarian-Swiss scholar which most clearly convey his ideas on ancient religion and mythology. In 1994, the major monograph on Dionysus was republished; this can be regarded as Karl Kerényi's magnum opus. *Antike Religion* (1995) and *Humanistische Seelenforschung* (1996) bring together fundamental reflections intended to make the ways of thinking and feeling of ancient man comprehensible to today's reader. La Mithologie (1997) contains those narratives through which Greek poets and mythographers illuminate the world with their beauty, their harshness and their contradictions. Gods and heroes are the protagonists of this world, recounted and depicted in images, whose distinctive characteristics were also defined in those times through rituals of veneration.*

This volume presents four gods through their myths and cults: Asclepius, the god of medicine; Hermes, the guide of souls (between life and death, but also between death and life); the enigmatic Cabiri; and Prometheus, the ill-fated benefactor of humanity. All four are male gods; and as such they form a polar opposite to the Daughters of the Sun, a separate volume published in 1997. Asclepius, Hermes, the Cabiri and Prometheus, however, for deeper reasons, form part of the same group (and this homogeneity is evident in many traits they share): of all the gods, they are the ones closest to the world of men and show solidarity with their helplessness and existential tragedy. Thus, Kerényi devoted himself to this subject with great intensity precisely during the 1940s, years of war and emigration, which is no coincidence either. All the texts gathered here appeared between 1942 and 1948.

In this edition, we have adhered to the principles set out in the epilogue to *Antike Religion* and, as far as possible, have retained the texts with their

notes unchanged. However, we have added an index of names and subjects. The following publications have formed the basis of this edition:

1. Der göttliche Arzt. Studien über Asklepios und seine Kultstätten, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 1956.

2. Hermes der Seelenführer. Das Mythologem vom männlichen Lebensursprung, special edition of the Eranos Jahrbuch, 1942. Volume IX, Rhein-Verlag, Zurich, 1943.

3. Mysteries of the Cabiri. An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Mysteries. Special edition of the Eranos Yearbook, 1944, Volume XI, Rhein-Verlag, Zurich, 1945 (excluding the short essay 'Castello di Tegna', which later became part of Tessiner Schreibtisch, Steingruben, Stuttgart, 1963).

4. Prometheus. Human Existence in Greek Interpretation, Rohwolt's German Encyclopaedia, vol. 95, Hamburg, 1959 (without the encyclopaedia entry 'Greek Mythology', an argument included in Antike Religion [1995]).

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CORNELIA ISLER-KERÉNYI

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